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Official Records

14th plenary meeting
Friday, 26 September 2003, 3 p.m.
New York

President: The Hon. Julian R. Hunte ..... (Saint Lucia)

The meeting was called to order at 3 p.m.

Address by Mr. Robert Mugabe, President of the Republic of Zimbabwe

The President: The Assembly will first hear an address by the President of the Republic of Zimbabwe.

Mr. Robert Mugabe, President of the Republic of Zimbabwe, was escorted into the General Assembly Hall.

The President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I have the honour to welcome to the United Nations His Excellency Mr. Robert Mugabe, President of the Republic of Zimbabwe, and to invite him to address the Assembly.

President Mugabe: Let me congratulate you, Sir, on your election to the presidency of the General Assembly at its fifty-eighth session. I am confident that your leadership as well as your vast political and diplomatic experience will successfully carry us through this session. We extend to your predecessor, Mr. Jan Kavan, our sincere appreciation for the excellent manner in which he guided the work of the General Assembly at its fifty-seventh session, which just ended.

Our meeting today is overshadowed by the death of Special Representative Sergio Vieira de Mello and of 22 other United Nations workers, who were killed in the line of duty in Baghdad on 19 August 2003.

I join my colleagues in extending my personal condolences and those of my Government and of the people of Zimbabwe to Secretary-General Kofi Annan and the bereaved families. Against this tragedy and the inauspicious developments in Iraq, we cannot allow ourselves to treat this session as merely routine. At the heart of the tragedy in that nation is the unprecedented assault on the ethic and function of multilateralism in world affairs represented by the Security Council, the only guarantor of global peace, order and security.

Some powerful Western nations, led by the Government of the United States of America and the Government of Britain, went into a war of unclear objectives in the face of clear opposition from the rest of the world, and, as we now know, with clear opposition from their own people as well.

It was and remains an unjust, illegitimate war — unjust to the extent that it was founded and prosecuted on false words; illegitimate to the extent that it was not sanctioned by the United Nations and has transformed itself into an effective occupation of a sovereign people.

There can never be world peace under conditions of foreign invasion and occupation. There can never be world security and order when naked power suspends, and substitutes with unilateralism, the hallowed principle of multilateralism, on the basis of which we have made, kept, preserved and expanded peace since the Second World War. We tell the General Assembly that as a people from a continent that has suffered a similar fate in recent history; indeed, as a people who had to overthrow foreign imperial occupation through costly struggles.

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It is a strange logic that the Iraqis pay for a bad president, a bad government and a bad war by occupation and loss of their sovereignty. Let us state here quite clearly to both Britain and the United States that the Iraqi people must have the sovereign right to determine the affairs of their country restored immediately. Like all peoples of the world, their love for freedom and self-rule is just as strong and just as deep as their hatred for bad leadership and bad government. Like all peoples of the world, they are unwilling to be occupied and governed by a foreign coalition, however willing and powerful it may be. No people want that, and we of Africa know it.

We must reject the present road map of naked unilateralism for consent-oriented statecraft in world affairs. What is the future of the world without the United Nations? We hope the coalition that willingly went to war with Iraq without Security Council sanction is now willing to admit that defeating others is not always the same as winning peace and that wars are ended not by proclamations, but by just settlements. Indeed, we hope that they have learned from their costly mistakes and are willing to let the United Nations reassert its authority in the broader search for peace and security in Iraq.

If we are to overcome crises that could result in calamitous wars and social breakdowns, and to achieve peace and stability with justice, we need humane global governance under the leadership of the United Nations, as distinct from a unilateral global state and government. Only that type of governance can make and build peace, and indeed keep peace for mankind.

Let it not be said that Zimbabwe enjoys criticizing the United States and Britain for the sake of criticism. Our criticisms are founded on sound, fundamental principles. Let it not be forgotten that Zimbabwe was in the chair when the Security Council authorized the first Gulf War. We stood firmly then by the United Nations and the countries, including the United States and Britain, that removed Iraq from Kuwait. We did so on the basis that expansionism and occupation of a sovereign country and people cannot be right, can never be just and warranted under any circumstances. We admired the deployment of power to just ends, under the auspices of the United Nations. It is the absence of the same ingredients that explains our indignation and our sharp censure of the so-called coalition of the willing that does not seem to recognize that both the Iraqis and the world are unwilling to sanction the means employed and the end achieved.

The inadequacies of existing international institutions in dealing with present challenges is a sad testimony to their flawed foundational conceptions amidst changing circumstances. We have anachronistic institutions relying too comfortably on traditional norms to address new challenges. Decades after the defeat of Nazi Germany, does the world still need to rely on a system founded on the principle of rewarding the allied Powers for defeating Nazi Germany and thereby bringing post-world war peace?

At its foundation, the United Nations collective system allowed two classes of response. If a minor Power committed aggression and there was unanimity among the five permanent members of the Security Council, a collective response could follow. However, if a permanent member was opposed to such action it could use its veto. In historical terms, that approach represents the institutionalization of a particular form of world order, namely, the immediate post-1945 world order, which sought to reward and empower the allied Powers as the only competent stewards of world peace. But the world has changed a great deal since then. Just as many new nations have emerged since then, the allied Powers have also evolved in ways that easily make them actors of injustice, and therefore threats to world peace. Global power is now unipolar.

The reality today is that we cannot treat the United Nations system as given. The institutional arrangements in place were relevant only for a specified period, and must inevitably be adapted, transformed or even radically modified as material circumstances have changed and prevailing meanings, practices and purposes have been challenged by new inter-subjective voices. In today's unipolar world, what can the Security Council do to one of its permanent members whose actions threaten world peace?

At a time when citizens everywhere are pressing for a greater say in national governance, it is imperative for us as heads of State and Government to seek, in turn, a fairer representation through the democratization of multilateral organizations such as the United Nations, the Bretton Woods institutions and the World Trade Organization. What is good for the goose must surely be good for the gander. The present autocracy in global governance must be challenged stoutly so that all nations, big or small, have an equal

say and equal power in the way in which we govern world affairs.

The Security Council just has to democratize, and that means re-examining its composition and the way in which power is distributed, and therefore exercised, within that crucial body. I am happy that the Secretary-General's current report entitled "Implementation of the United Nations Millennium Declaration", is in agreement with our concerns that

> "The composition of the Security Council — unchanged in its essentials since 1945 — seems at odds with the geopolitical realities of the twenty-first century." [A/58/323, para. 96]

In the light of that stark reality, it is evident that the decisions of the Security Council, which have a decisive impact on events in the real world, increasingly lack legitimacy in the eyes of the developing world.

Even the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development, popularly known as the World Bank, whose raison d'être was to provide assistance to the developing world, have succumbed to the whims and caprices of the major Powers. The Bretton Woods institutions, in their current form and practice, are designed to deny developing countries the capacity to chart their independent developmental path. The extraneous conditionalities of the Bretton Woods institutions, imposed by the powerful countries for the qualification or disqualification of beneficiaries, are intended to further the national interests of the big Powers and to justify wanton interference in the affairs of small nations.

Is it not a baffling irony that a small country like Zimbabwe, which, after it responded positively to a distress call by a neighbour suffering aggression — even by United Nations reckoning — was deemed ineligible to access IMF and World Bank funding for the very reason of having gone to the rescue of that neighbour? One hopes that the new, recent realization by the World Bank that land reforms are at the heart of poverty eradication mark the beginning of a new outlook on its part.

Notwithstanding that determined and resolute attempt at frustrating our land-reform programme, the fast-track phase through which we reasserted our sovereign right over our land as a principal resource is largely concluded, and is now yielding tangible benefits to the vast majority of our people. There is a new sense of empowerment, yielding a happy sense of ownership, which has brought thousands upon thousands of hitherto marginalized families back into the economic mainstream. Zimbabwe's National Economic Revival Programme gives clear priority to agriculture as the engine for economic revival and growth. We are forging ahead on the basis of our own efforts and support from nations of good will. We are determined to move on and succeed. A land review committee recently set up by my Government to assess the whole reform programme has now submitted its findings, which will help us in mapping the way forward to achieve sustainable development in the agricultural sector, in line with the criteria and objectives we set ourselves.

In the area of world trade, Zimbabwe believes in a multilateral trading system that serves well all members of the trading nations. It is therefore a matter of some grave regret that the developing countries of the South and those of the developed North could not reconcile their differences, and thus rendered inconclusive the Cancún mid-term review of the World Trade Organization's (WTO) Doha Development Agenda. We in the South were right to reject the so-called new issues that the North insisted be negotiated first. We urge the North to engage in honest negotiations and to desist from trying to use the WTO forum for hegemonic ends.

Zimbabwe and other countries in the subregion continue to grapple with the effects of the HIV/AIDS scourge. To combat the epidemic, my Government has declared HIV/AIDS a national emergency. We have embarked on a national programme of prevention, the highlight of which consists of mass mobilization to deepen awareness and understanding of the disease. As a result of that campaign, our infection rate in the sexually active 15 to 49 age group has come down from 35 per cent to 24 per cent. Through our national efforts, the AIDS levy has to date raised $8 billion. That money is being distributed through a decentralized structure that ensures accessibility right down to the village level. We call upon the international community to complement our efforts.

The situation in the Middle East remains grave and troubled. A conflict that is quite costly on both sides of the divide continues unabated, with the only response from the international community coming by way of episodic judgements that maldistribute blame on the basis of individual national interests. Especially

wrong is the belief that settlement can come only through ostracizing and even eliminating the leadership of the Palestinian people. Assassinations and extrajudicial killings must be rejected as a formula for peace.

Zimbabwe welcomes the measures adopted by the Security Council aimed at strengthening the peace process in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. We are encouraged by the increase, under a Chapter VII mandate, of the force levels of the United Nations Organization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, as well as by the imposition of a 12-month arms embargo over areas in the troubled eastern part of the Congo.

We also urge the international community to rally behind the peace initiative of the Economic Community of West African States aimed at bringing peace to Liberia. The transition to peace in Liberia has confirmed that, with international goodwill and support, African solutions to African problems are possible. To strengthen the peace process, we call upon the international community to address the humanitarian crisis facing the Liberian people as a result of a debilitating civil war.

My country remains committed to playing a positive role in peacekeeping efforts carried out under the auspices of the United Nations. Indeed, we have so far played our part fully and magnificently.

The President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the President of the Republic of Zimbabwe for the statement he has just made.

Mr. Robert Mugabe, President of the Republic of Zimbabwe, was escorted from the General Assembly Hall.

Agenda item 9 (*continued*)

General debate

The President: I now call on His Excellency Mr. Abdullah Gül, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs of Turkey.

Mr. Gül (Turkey): I should like to start by extending our warmest congratulations to you, Mr. President, on your election as President of the General Assembly at its fifty-eighth session, as well as our full support. I also wish to pay tribute to Mr. Jan Kavan, the President of the General Assembly at its fifty-seventh session.

The memory of the many innocent people who lost their lives during the horrors of 11 September, and that of many other victims of terror all over the world, including in my country, are still very fresh in our minds today. We also mourn the painful loss of our United Nations colleagues. They were working in the service of the international community to secure peace and to uphold human dignity in Baghdad. The loss of Sergio Vieira de Mello was particularly tragic for us, as his visit to Ankara two weeks before his tragic death unfortunately turned out to be his last. Terrorism is a crime against humanity. We are duty-bound to eradicate that evil from the face of the Earth, and soon.

We must also not forget that there are other major challenges that remain to be addressed, namely, poverty, illiteracy, organized crime, the problem of narcotics, ecological disasters, epidemics such as AIDS, the issue of refugees, the illegal trade in human beings, gender inequality, corruption, racism and xenophobia, among others.

In the new global security environment, there is a clear and pressing need to strengthen international organizations and institutions. The United Nations is at the top of that list. The many challenges facing the world today underline the central role of the United Nations, as has been highlighted so eloquently by the Secretary-General. The efforts to adapt this unique Organization to the realities of today's international life should be resolutely pursued. The world needs a more representative, effective and efficient United Nations.

In close cooperation with the United Nations, Turkey has accumulated vast experience over the years in the areas of regional cooperation, peacekeeping and conflict prevention. We have also shown a strong will to solve our bilateral foreign policy problems. Today we have very good relations with some neighbouring countries with which we experienced difficulties in the recent past. We are also doing our best to contribute to the solution of problems in the Middle East, the Balkans and the Caucasus.

In order to promote harmony among civilizations, we convened a meeting last year in Istanbul between the European Union and the countries of the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC). Next year, both the NATO summit and the OIC's ministerial meeting will be held in that city.

My Government's reforms at home reflect a sustained effort to promote democracy, human rights,

the rule of law, civil society, good governance, accountability and gender equality to the highest standards set by the United Nations and the European Union. The results show that national and spiritual values can be in perfect harmony with contemporary living standards. Integrati n with the world is not possible without bringing our values and traditions into harmony with modernity.

It is on the strength of that increasingly relevant Turkish experience and on the strength of the richness of our ties with the international community that Turkey has decided to present its candidature for a seat in the Security Council for the years 2009-2010.

The situation in the Middle East will remain of crucial significance for the evolution of the international environment for some time to come. We do not believe that the Middle East is condemned to eternal strife and suffering. This is one cradle of civilization that had enjoyed peace and prosperity for centuries. That is why we believe that it is feasible today to transform the Middle East into a region of security, cooperation and prosperity. There is an urgent need today for a fresh start in the region. The situation in Iraq and the Arab-Israeli conflict are at the core of efforts to bring stability to the region.

The events of this year have brought Iraq to the beginning of a new era. All of us need to help the Iraqi nation in its formidable task of building a united, free, democratic and prosperous future. It is therefore highly important for the Security Council to agree on a mandate responsive to the needs of stabilization and reconstruction. Iraq is our close neighbour. That country's future and the future of the region's stability are inter-linked.

In the Middle East we are again witnessing a cycle of terror and violence that is taking hostage all efforts towards peace. We view the restoration of the channels of communication and dialogue between Palestinians and Israelis as the most urgent task at hand. We believe that sending the elected President of the Palestinian National Authority into exile cannot serve any good purpose. We call upon the Israeli Government to review its position. At the same time, we urge the Palestinian side to make every effort to prevent further terrorist attacks. Turkey has close ties with both Israelis and Palestinians. We remain ready to contribute to the implementation of the road map, to which we believe there is no alternative. We are also willing to contribute to the improvement of the security environment as needed, and to the alleviation of the harsh living conditions of Palestinians.

In order to achieve progress, resources have to be utilized rationally and to the benefit of the people, as the Iraqi case has shown. The need for reform is not a novelty in the Middle East. What may be new is the growing recognition that progress is dependent on political and social factors, as well as on economic ones. Gradual steps towards more representative and accountable structures are being taken by a number of countries in the Middle East. They deserve the encouragement of the international community.

The world needs the elimination of weapons of mass destruction. It does not need them to proliferate. The inherent logic of that argument has been recognized by the community of nations that have adhered to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons. We strongly support the efforts aimed at increasing membership in non-proliferation agreements and regimes.

My country's regional policies are shaped by our desire to achieve durable peace and greater cooperation in our neighbourhood. I have already outlined our approach with regard to the Middle East.

The Balkans, which is to our west, was in turmoil until recently. That region has come to enjoy relative peace and stability in the past two years. International organizations, notably NATO, the European Union, the United Nations and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, played a major role in that turnaround. However, the situation in certain parts of the region should continue to be monitored on an ongoing basis, as it is a potential source of destabilization.

We are determined to further enhance our relations with Greece within the current process of constructive dialogue. We are pleased with the progress achieved so far, as highlighted by my Greek colleague, Mr. Papandreou, in the statement he made this morning. We have already covered considerable ground. We are convinced that the ongoing dialogue and the resulting atmosphere of mutual confidence will serve the interests of both Turkey and Greece.

Turkey sincerely desires a lasting political settlement establishing a new partnership in Cyprus. This issue has been with us since 1963. Attempts to distort the facts in the island will not help efforts aimed

at a comprehensive settlement. We continue to support the good offices mission of the Secretary-General. A new partnership in Cyprus should be based on a compromise between Turkish and Greek Cypriots and on equal status. Furthermore, a settlement should preserve the bizonal character of the island and ensure the security of the Turkish Cypriot people.

At the present stage of the situation in Cyprus it is necessary to create a basis for substantive negotiations. The opportunity created by President Denktas' latest proposals, which are designed to overcome the lack of confidence between the two sides, should be seized. Indeed, the Greek Cypriot side, instead of trying to take advantage of the prospect of its unilateral accession to the European Union, should act in a spirit of goodwill and contribute to the negotiating process. All embargoes and restrictions imposed upon the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus should be lifted as a matter of priority.

The Caucasus is another strategically important area of great interest to Turkey. The long-standing conflicts there must end, and good-neighbourly relations and regional cooperation should be given a real chance to flourish. The problems of Nagorny Karabakh and Abkhazia still endanger peace and stability in the entire region. Turkey expects Armenia to fully comply with the relevant United Nations resolutions in order to find a prompt and just solution to the Nagorny Karabakh conflict. The peaceful settlement of this conflict will contribute to the normalization of Turkish-Armenian relations and to regional cooperation. As regards the Abkhazian conflict, Turkey believes that a peaceful settlement should be reached within the context of the territorial integrity, sovereignty and political unity of Georgia.

Close historical and cultural bonds with Central Asia constitute one of the pillars of our Eurasian vision. We have developed mutually beneficial bilateral relations with the Central Asian States since their independence. We should make substantial efforts to improve regional stability and security and continue to support those States with a view to their further integration into the international community. We all know that the security of Central Asia is inseparable from global security.

Traditionally a close friend of Afghanistan, Turkey has contributed for many years to the rehabilitation of that country. We are pleased that the Bonn process has so far been implemented successfully, despite numerous difficulties. We commend the performance of the Transitional Administration in this respect. The success of the Bonn process will depend to a large extent on greater support from the international community.

We firmly believe that it will not be possible to establish global stability unless peace, security, democracy and sustainable development are promoted in Africa. Recent trends in the management of crises in Africa, as well as the New Partnership for Africa's Development, give us fresh hope in this regard.

In conclusion, I should like to stress that Turkey is determined to remain a major contributor to peace, security and stability in our region and beyond. Turkey pursues a multidimensional foreign policy that is active in various regions. We believe in the vital role of the United Nations and its increased relevance in the present international environment, and we are committed to promoting the effectiveness of our Organization.

The President: I now give the floor to His Excellency The Honourable Phil Goff, Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade of New Zealand.

Mr. Goff (New Zealand): The General Assembly is meeting in the shadow of the tragedy last month in which United Nations staff were killed or injured in Baghdad. New Zealand unreservedly condemns such brutal and calculated acts of terror. The United Nations, after all, was in Iraq to improve the conditions of Iraqi people and to assist the restoration of Iraqi sovereignty.

We mourn the loss of all those who perished. In particular, I pay tribute to Sergio Vieira de Mello, who worked so effectively in the world's trouble spots, including Timor-Leste, where New Zealand worked alongside him and developed huge admiration for his ability and determination.

This was not the first occasion on which the employees of the international community have been targeted, although it was the worst. History suggests that it will not be the last.

To do its work effectively, the United Nations must interact with local communities, not operate from behind barbed wire and concrete barriers. Its employees are mainly unarmed civilians. We, the States Members of the United Nations, must do more to protect those whom we employ to work on our behalf.

Nine years ago New Zealand was at the forefront in creating the Convention for the Safety of United

Nations and Associated Personnel. It was opened for signature in 1995. Regrettably, only one third of the membership has since become a party to it. We urge all countries to do so now.

New Zealand believes that the Convention should be widened to cover all situations where United Nations and other associated personnel are engaged in peacekeeping, humanitarian and other assistance-related activities.

Over the last year we have witnessed terrorist attacks, including in Casablanca, Riyadh and Jakarta, as well as in Baghdad.

Next month is the first anniversary of the terrorist attack in Bali, in which more than 200 people lost their lives. And two years ago this city itself was the victim of the 9/11 attacks, which took 3,000 lives. International terrorism remains the primary threat to the security and well-being of people across the world.

If we are to defeat terrorism, regional cooperation is imperative. In the Asia Pacific region, a concerted response to terrorism is now at the centre of the Association of South-east Asian Nations Regional Forum agenda and is becoming increasingly important in the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation.

The Pacific Islands Forum is responding collectively to security challenges, including terrorism, transnational crimes and challenges to national integrity and independence.

An effective campaign against terrorism requires international collaboration on intelligence, military, social and economic measures.

New Zealand is aware that while we focus on the symptoms of terrorism, the international community must work together to tackle the conditions that foster it. We welcome the Norwegian initiative to strengthen analysis of the causes of terrorism. There are simply no ends that can justify the death and the maiming of vulnerable and innocent people.

New Zealand has, since 1972, supported the development of a comprehensive international regime to outlaw terrorism. I hope that the General Assembly will be able to move forward on this issue and conclude the comprehensive and nuclear terrorism conventions.

In combating terrorism, however, we should avoid undermining the very values we are seeking to uphold. The fight against terrorism should not become an excuse to justify actions that do not conform to international standards of humanity.

New Zealand is the current Chair of the Pacific Islands Forum, which it hosted last month. Leaders strongly endorsed the Regional Assistance Mission to the Solomon Islands — a concrete example of the region working together to assist one of its members to restore security, stability and progress to its people.

New Zealand joined with the other members of the Pacific Islands Forum in responding to a request from the Solomon Islands Government for police and military assistance to end the actions of armed criminals responsible for the deterioration in the social and economic conditions in the Solomon Islands. A police-led operation has been working successfully to restore the rule of law and economic stability.

In failed or weak States, Governments often lack the capacity or will to exercise territorial control. That can create a power vacuum for terrorist organizations and criminals to exploit and maintain safe havens, training facilities and bases for launching terrorist operations.

The Regional Assistance Mission has gone exceptionally well to date and has received strong support from the people of the Solomon Islands. It is a Pacific solution to a Pacific problem. Cooperation and commitment by Pacific States to respond to regional security needs, under the umbrella of the Pacific Islands Forum, is a model that other regions could adopt.

The statements of support from the Secretary-General and the Security Council for this regional action, taken in accordance with the Charter, are welcome. We would urge the United Nations to assist where it can the process of rebuilding the social structure and the economy of that country.

New Zealand is working to enhance and complement existing security capabilities within the Pacific region. We are engaged in a number of activities, including establishing border security systems and drafting model legislation to address terrorism and transnational organized crime.

The international community must retain an ongoing commitment to Afghanistan, where President Karzai's Government continues to face significant challenges. Improving security outside Kabul will be a crucial element in bringing political stability to Afghanistan.

It is in the interests of us all to assist in the restoration of Afghanistan — not only for the well-being of the Afghan people, but also so that terrorists cannot operate freely within its borders.

Earlier this week, New Zealand assumed leadership of the Provincial Reconstruction Team in Bamian Province. I am pleased that we could demonstrate support for the Afghanistan Transitional Government in this way.

The shared nightmare of all States is that weapons of mass destruction or the materials from which they can be constructed will find their way into the terrorist arsenal. The possibility of nuclear weapons in the hands of terrorists is a worst-case scenario with horrific implications. We must do everything we can to prevent this from happening.

The possible acquisition of nuclear weapons by terrorist groups increases as the numbers and types of these weapons, and the States that possess them, continue to expand. For these and other reasons the elimination of these weapons is vital.

New Zealand calls on all countries to commit and to adhere to multilateral disarmament and arms control treaties.

North Korea's proclaimed nuclear weapons programme is a major concern. We urge North Korea to resume its cooperation with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and its commitment to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). The current multilateral dialogue process is a positive way forward. We commend China for facilitating this.

Iran, too, must heed the strong message of the international community and take the urgent steps required to restore confidence that its nuclear intentions are peaceful.

The Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty is equally about nuclear disarmament. The commitment given by the nuclear-weapon States to give up their nuclear weapons, reaffirmed unequivocally at the NPT Review Conference in 2000, must be honoured.

The nuclear Powers have a particular responsibility in this respect. They must lead by example against proliferation. Meaningful steps toward permanent disarmament would add to their moral authority in demanding that others must not develop nuclear weapons capability.

The invasion of Iraq has had a profound impact on this Organization. We regret that differences of view could not be resolved in the Security Council.

The reconstruction of Iraq, the restoration of its sovereignty and the rebuilding of political and social structures to guarantee the Iraqi people a better life are now the critical issues. We welcome initiatives to push forward the political and constitutional process.

The passage of Security Council resolutions 1483 (2003) and 1500 (2003) recognizes the vital role of the United Nations and the need for the international community to be fully engaged in reconstruction efforts. While responsibility for security must inevitably rest with coalition forces, multilateralism offers the best prospect and the greatest legitimacy for the process of transition back to Iraqi self-rule.

New Zealand has announced substantial contributions to reconstruction and humanitarian relief work. These include the deployment of a New Zealand Defence Force light engineer group to work on humanitarian and reconstruction tasks alongside a United Kingdom engineer regiment in southern Iraq. We have helped with demining operations and have made contributions through United Nations agencies, the International Committee of the Red Cross and non-governmental organizations.

New Zealand continues to view the United Nations as the best hope we have to collectively pursue the principles enshrined in the Charter. The strength of the United Nation is that it brings all countries of the world together on an equal footing to address common problems. Millions of people around the world have had their lives improved by the actions of the United Nations. East Timor is but one recent example of its effectiveness when it is supported by a common will to act.

At the same time, we all recognize the need to reform the Organization. In opening this session, the Secretary-General called on us to consider whether the rules and instruments of this multilateral institution continue to serve us well. We have been discussing the reform of the Security Council for more than a decade now. It is time to make an institution designed in an earlier age, for a smaller number of nations more representative and responsive to the 191 current Members of the United Nations. We welcome the establishment of a panel to address key issues fundamental to the Organization's future role. Member States will need to put aside self-interest and

differences to reach agreement on the panel's findings and to translate those into action.

Fifty-eight years ago, the United Nations was created in the aftermath of the death and devastation that had resulted from two world wars. The vision of its founders was that of an organization that would establish rules to govern international behaviour, with procedures to enforce them through collective action. The United Nations was bestowed with a unique legitimacy and unique authority to resolve conflict. Whatever its shortcomings, it remains an indispensable organization.

The challenge before us is to create the structures and provide the political will that will enable it to deliver the peaceful, just and prosperous world that is the hope and expectation of humanity.

The President: I now call on His Excellency Sheik Hamad bin Jassem bin Jabr Al-Thani, First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs of the State of Qatar.

Sheik Al-Thani (Qatar) (*spoke in Arabic*): It gives me great pleasure to extend to you, Sir, our sincere congratulations on your election to the presidency of the fifty-eighth session of the General Assembly. Allow me to wish you and the members of the Bureau every possible success. I should also like to express our thanks and appreciation to your predecessor, Mr. Jan Kavan, President of the fifty-seventh session, for his great efforts in conducting the work of the General Assembly. It also gives me pleasure to recognize Secretary-General Kofi Annan, who deserves our sincere thanks, respect and admiration for his tireless efforts.

Today, the world is experiencing a difficult, critical and highly complex phase in international relations, marked by political and strategic changes affecting the elements and objectives of those relations. This is the result of the emergence of a new, complicated and multifaceted set of problems and acute regional and international crises, whose root causes we must deal with promptly and in a serious manner. Moreover, we must prevent such crises from worsening and spreading. We must therefore strive to strengthen the role of the United Nations, enhance its institutions and provide it with the essential resources so it can fulfil its mission throughout the world.

First, it is imperative that we mobilize the political will needed to enable the Organization to shoulder its responsibilities and carry out its duties. That is particularly important for the permanent members of the Security Council because those countries bear the primary responsibility for achieving that goal, which will enable the Organization to perform its functions in a genuinely democratic spirit, reflecting the new international conditions and the interests and aspirations of all peoples of the world without exclusion or preference.

In that context, we underline the need to reach agreement on a new formula for the composition of the Security Council and to modernize its working methods, as it is the international body charged with the primary responsibility for maintaining international peace and security. The Council's current composition, working methods and decision-making process do not respond to the needs of the international community or give Member States an opportunity to speak on the vital and critical issues that affect us all.

In the State of Qatar, we were shocked and saddened by the horrific attack on the United Nations headquarters in Baghdad. That attack claimed the lives of many innocent victims: the United Nations staff members who were carrying out their humanitarian mission, foremost among them the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Mr. Sergio Vieira de Mello, and many Iraqis. That heinous act of terrorism illustrates in our view the nature of the challenges and the seriousness of the threats besetting the work of the United Nations and international humanitarian organizations in Iraq and elsewhere. We also strongly condemn the terrorist act targeting the United Nations headquarters in Iraq earlier this week.

The difficult and tragic circumstances now prevailing in the brotherly country of Iraq compel us to cooperate in order to help the Iraqi people overcome that situation and its consequences.

I must underline once again the fundamental principles underlying our position with respect to the Iraqi crisis and the means necessary to deal with it. We have consistently affirmed our commitment to the territorial integrity, national unity and sovereignty of Iraq and to the right of Iraqis to self-determination, to the restoration of their independence and sovereignty and to the reconstruction of their homeland, as well as to their right to live in dignity and freedom in their own land.

In that context, we look forward to the success of the international efforts to strengthen security and stability in Iraq. We call upon the coalition forces to

achieve that essential objective and to intensify coordination with the competent international bodies and institutions in order to pave the way for the country's return to normalcy. We call upon the coalition forces to allow the Iraqi people, of all factions and political trends, to exercise their legitimate right to choose their own political leadership through free, democratic elections, giving expression to their aspirations, hopes and wishes.

In that regard, we also welcome the establishment of the Interim Governing Council and the interim Iraqi Government that emerged from it; they mark an important positive step, and we hope that they will contribute to achieving the desired transition towards consolidated democracy in the country and the reconstruction and rehabilitation of Iraqi State institutions. That should be accomplished by drafting a new constitution, holding free democratic elections, putting an early end to the occupation through a specific timetable and allowing Iraq to reclaim its rightful position in the region and in the larger international community.

We urge the United Nations to play an effective, essential role in helping Iraq achieve those objectives. Moreover, the international community is urgently called upon to help in Iraq's reconstruction and to meet the Iraqi people's needs in various areas in order to build a new Iraq of democracy, equality and respect for human rights.

With regard to developing Iraq's infrastructure of higher education, it is noteworthy that the consort of His Royal Highness the Emir of the State of Qatar, Her Royal Highness Sheikha Mozah bint Nasser Al-Misnad, Special Envoy for Basic and Higher Education + 5 of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), launched a lofty initiative in a statement before the World Conference on Higher Education, held in Paris at UNESCO headquarters. The initiative called for the establishment of an international fund for Iraqi higher education, with the objective of providing both immediate and long-term assistance for the rehabilitation of higher education in brotherly Iraq. The State of Qatar has made the first contribution to the fund, in the amount of $15 million.

My country has also been participating in international efforts to rebuild Iraq. It has developed a special programme that includes the building of hospitals and educational and residential units. In addition, we have a special programme in Afghanistan that assists in the rebuilding of that country; the programme's cost has amounted to $62 million thus far.

The Arab-Israeli conflict and the question of Palestine are at the top of the list of the conflicts that need concerted action in order to achieve a just, final and comprehensive solution, particularly in the light of the continuation and acceleration of the bloody confrontation that has raged between the Palestinian people and Israeli occupation forces for so many years. It must be noted that we in the State of Qatar have welcomed the road map. We expressed our support for the Quartet's efforts to have both sides begin implementing the various stages of the road map, in keeping with the vision articulated by Mr. George Bush, President of the United States, as a basis for the final solution of establishing two States living side by side. We did so despite the many difficulties, obstacles and setbacks encountered by those efforts in the past few weeks. We must also firmly stress that implementation of the road map cannot be undertaken by only one side — the Palestinian people. It requires that the Israeli side also fulfil its obligations and take the necessary actions in that regard.

All of the aforementioned requires that the international community and the members of the Quartet — particularly the United States of America — intervene, intensify their efforts and increase their pressure on the Israeli Government so that it will do its part, in return for the Palestinians' commitment to do theirs. Thus, Israeli occupation forces must refrain from carrying out assassinations, must lift the siege that they have imposed on Palestinian territories, enable the Palestinians to live in security, peace and dignity on their own land and to move freely in their own areas, put an end to the policies of starvation, humiliation and house demolition, and cease construction of the buffer wall currently being built by the Israeli authorities.

In that connection, I cannot fail to note the positive gesture that we witnessed a few days ago by the Libyan Government's closing of the Lockerbie file, an outcome that was achieved in cooperation with the other parties concerned and in the context of United Nations institutions. We should also note the positive response of the Governments of the United States, the United Kingdom and France to that gesture, which bore fruit and ultimately led to the conclusion of an agreement.

The phenomena of terrorism and extremism continue to be among the most important challenges

facing the world. As we express our total rejection and condemnation of those subversive phenomena — in all their forms and manifestations, and regardless of their sources or motivations — we reaffirm that we stand by the side of the international community and that we support whatever efforts and measures are required to eliminate terrorism and to strengthen the foundations of security and stability.

Democracy is an expression of responsible participation in political decision-making. It involves the establishment of State institutions and adherence to the rule of law within the State; it provides for accountability and for assessment of the performance of governmental institutions; it ensures good governance and safeguards the rights of citizens. As such, it is the best way to achieve the priorities of national development and the objectives of modernization and reform, to which our peoples and societies aspire. On the basis of those principles, the State of Qatar recently conducted a referendum on a political Constitution that gives women the right to political participation, both as voters and as candidates for Parliament, which will be elected through the ballot box for the first time. The Constitution also governs the relationship between the Government and the people and provides for the separation of the three branches of government.

With regard to human rights, an independent human rights commission has been established in the State of Qatar. The commission submits its recommendations to competent State authorities with a view to developing and improving civil liberties. As promoting awareness of civil rights requires that we improve education and upgrade its standards — as well as expanding it to include all segments of society — we have restructured our educational system. Moreover, a number of well-known universities based in developed countries have set up branches in the State of Qatar.

In conclusion, the fulfilment of our aspirations lies in affirming the role of the United Nations, in enhancing its position and in maximizing its potential. It is through the Organization that we hope to establish international relations on the basis of understanding, cooperation and common interests. And it is through the United Nations that we hope one day to succeed in settling crises and disputes; eliminating threats of violence, the use of force and terrorism; and ending the wasting of resources and energies on wars and conflicts, directing them instead to the service of development, progress and prosperity. Similarly, we aspire to a new world built on the principles of justice, equality, liberty, democracy and peaceful coexistence among all the world's peoples, nations and cultures. That is an aspiration that our peoples, our youth and our future generations fully deserve. It is an aspiration to which we are wedded and which we cherish, because that vision occupies the highest priority in building the world of the future: the world that we all seek and desire. It is a world that we hope one day to attain as an international community — as one family living together on this planet, God willing.

The President: I now call on Her Excellency The Honourable Billie Miller, Senior Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Foreign Trade of Barbados.

Ms. Miller (Barbados): I take special pleasure in congratulating you, Sir, on your assumption of the presidency of the General Assembly at its fifty-eighth session. The unanimous election of the smallest State ever to hold that post speaks not only of the confidence which Member States place in your own ability, but also of their recognition of the critical role which small States play in the multilateral process. We are delighted at your elevation to this high office, and we wish to assure you that, in carrying out your responsibilities, you will be able to count on the unequivocal support not only of Saint Lucia, but also of the entire Caribbean fraternity. I wish also to thank your predecessor, Mr. Jan Kavan, who very ably guided the work of the fifty-seventh session of the General Assembly during a most trying and tumultuous year.

On 19 August, the world was again plunged into shock and despair as we witnessed the heinous attack on the United Nations Office in Baghdad and the loss of life of United Nations personnel stationed there. A second attempt this week added to the toll of casualties. I extend to the United Nations family, as well as the delegations represented here, whose compatriots were the victims of that violent attack, the deepest condolences of the Government and people of Barbados.

We pause especially to pay tribute to Mr. Sergio Vieira de Mello, an international civil servant and diplomat of the highest calibre. His death comes at a time when the world can least afford it. We join with Members in mourning his passing as we mourn all those who perished at his side in the service of the people of Iraq.

Amidst the turmoil and carnage that has become a dismal feature of the daily life of so many millions in

our global society, this assault on the United Nations was particularly startling in its cruelty and distressing in its intention. As our Secretary-General has affirmed: "This was the most deliberate and vicious attack against the United Nations in its history." It is the cruellest of ironies that such an attack could have been conceived and carried out against an Organization in which we all have a stake, and one which epitomizes the principles and ideals to which we all ascribe, and whose primary purpose is peace.

The global environment, over the past year, has teetered on the brink of chaos. We have witnessed increased instances of the pursuit of violence and retribution as first responses to the resolution of conflict, and we have experienced the relegation of diplomacy and multilateralism to afterthoughts.

Some of the most intractable problems facing the international community, in the year 2003 and beyond, are the divisions, uncertainties and doubts that have emerged since the United States-led invasion of Iraq. Our duty as members of this family of nations is to ensure that we remain committed to the United Nations, as the only organization that can move us past the current cycle of retribution to a path of sustainable peace. As we search for adequate collective responses to the non-traditional threats to human security, the task ahead will be to bring to bear a comprehensive, multidimensional approach to security, in all its aspects, and to reiterate the continued relevance of this concept to the global agenda.

The challenges to small States in such an uncertain environment are numerous and at times overwhelming. We lack the financial dexterity to respond to economic crises as swiftly and decisively as is necessary. We have no military might and so our only avenue for handling traditional threats to security rests squarely within a multilateral framework, which resorts to military action only when, despite our best efforts, peace cannot be achieved through diplomacy.

Since the end of the conflicts of European empire-building, our region, the Caribbean, has had a history of peace and stability, which is sustained through a simple but sure formula: celebration of our commonalities; tolerance of our differences; mutual respect for each other's sovereignty; and adherence to the principles of democracy, good governance and the rule of law. We would wish to commend this formula to those who find the key to peaceful co-existence elusive.

Barbados remains unwavering in its commitment to the precepts of multilateralism, and to the belief that no other international institution is better suited or equipped to meet the diverse demands for global peace, security and development than the United Nations. As members of this Organization, we are assured that our voice will be heard regardless of our size or economic power. Therefore, while we may not have the capacity to influence situations by way of exerting military, economic or even political power, we do cherish our right to express our opinions about any issue of concern to us, without let or hindrance.

The United Nations is not a third party separate from the Member Governments but is rather the sum of its Members; it belongs to them and they share all the benefits, problems and collective responsibilities of ownership. Barbados shares the view so eloquently expressed by the Secretary-General that: "The United Nations exists, not as a static memorial to the aspirations of an earlier age, but as a work in progress — imperfect, as all human endeavours must be, but capable of adaptation and improvement." We are all accountable for its shortcomings and must all strive for its improvement.

To the extent that the United Nations represents our collective effort at a mechanism for global governance, it is amenable to the benefits of good governance practices. For we believe that good governance is as important at the international level as it is at the national level. It is perhaps the single most important factor in promoting development, reducing inequalities and advancing the cause of peace.

We should therefore seize this moment in time to recommit ourselves to making the United Nations more effective and efficient. Bold and serious reorganization initiatives, including the revitalization of the General Assembly, and the reform of the Security Council are urgently needed. We must also find effective coordination modalities to give new impetus to the follow-up to the major conferences and summits of the last decade, which, in most instances, have simply been reduced to standing items on the annual agenda of this body and rhetoric-filled resolutions reaffirming the status quo.

We must resolve, during this session and henceforth, to take concrete actions towards making the Security Council more representative and transparent and towards ensuring that the General Assembly moves beyond the symbolic politics of passing resolutions to the hard work of negotiating change.

For it is a source of the greatest continuing concern to us that too many of the premier multilateral institutions — which are charged with the fundamental responsibility of shaping the rules by which global society is governed, whether in the area of peace and security, or trade, or finance and development — are constrained by structure and tradition to carry out their mandate in a manner that is patently devoid of democracy or transparency. Reform must therefore extend beyond the confines of New York to reach deep into the operations of the international financial institutions, the World Trade Organization, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, the Financial Action Task Force on Money-Laundering and all other bodies that seek to prescribe the norms of behaviour for the international community without the full participation of that community in the decision-making process.

If the International Conference on Financing for Development had one failing, it was its inability to conceive of a new system for financial governance to redress the deficiencies and imbalances of the past — a system that is durable enough to serve for generations to come. In this regard, I wish to reiterate the call made at Monterrey by the Prime Minister of Barbados, The Right Honourable Owen Arthur, for the creation of a rules-based world financial authority to supervise today's complex global financial and capital markets better than the Bretton Woods institutions can, and for an international tax organization to oversee global cooperation in cross-border tax matters.

Despite a commitment made by all States at Monterrey towards the development of a universal framework to facilitate all-inclusive dialogue on matters pertaining to international tax cooperation, sufficient progress has not been forthcoming. While we are encouraged by and supportive of recent proposals to strengthen the United Nations Ad Hoc Group of Experts on International Cooperation in Tax Matters, these efforts are insufficient to provide for a truly universal, transparent and legitimate intergovernmental framework to promote cooperation among all States on tax matters.

Equally, Barbados believes that the all-important fight against money-laundering must now be waged by the international community as a whole, led by a genuinely representative international body, drawing its membership from all the countries of the world, within the family of the United Nations. While we are most appreciative of the vital work that has been done in this regard by the Financial Action Task Force, that body remains what it has always been, a task force with a limited role, and an even more limited membership of only 31 countries.

An important step would be the adoption of an international convention against money-laundering, under the auspices of the United Nations. Such a convention would establish a genuine international consensus on the issue of money-laundering within the universal ambit of the United Nations, where the interests and concerns of all Member States would be fairly and equally served in a common endeavour against international crime. The proposed convention would complement the work of the United Nations under the 1988 Convention against Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances, as well as the more recent Convention Against Transnational Organized Crime.

In this connection, we believe that the greatest lesson to emerge from the experience of Cancun is the clear understanding that strategies and solutions that ignore the concerns and needs of the developing world, or that fail to analyse the implications of those solutions for the most fragile and vulnerable, are doomed to failure. The special needs of small States that have no capacity whatsoever to distort world trade must be taken fully into account in fashioning the new rules of trade liberalization. To do otherwise would be to condemn the most vulnerable groups of our global family to the real threat of marginalization by a multilateral system that is supposed to provide benefits for all. It is vital that focus be restored to the Doha Development Agenda and its work programme on small economies.

Next year marks the tenth anniversary of the Global Conference on the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States. Out of that conference emerged the Barbados Programme of Action, which today still remains the essential blueprint for the sustainable development aspirations of all small island developing States (SIDS). As de facto custodian of the name attached to the SIDS process, Barbados accords great importance to the convening of an international meeting next year in Mauritius to review the implementation of the Barbados Programme of Action.

We are convinced that the vulnerability and sustainable development challenges of SIDS, as expressed in the Barbados Programme of Action, in

Agenda 21, the Millennium Declaration and the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation are now better understood by the international community. According to estimates, since 1994 small island developing States themselves have carried out approximately 70 per cent of the required actions and measures contained in the Barbados Programme of Action. The Mauritius review will present an important opportunity for us to take stock of new and emerging challenges and identify additional resources to advance implementation.

The World Summit on the Information Society is conceived as a high-level dialogue leading to achieving a new kind of society, characterized by universal access to and use of information for the creation, accumulation and dissemination of knowledge. It implies the use of traditional and new technologies, especially information and communication technologies, as an essential tool for the enhancement of services and the promotion of dialogue among diverse cultures towards the attainment of a more peaceful, prosperous and just world. We support the principle that the new information society must serve the best interests of all nations and peoples. It must seek through the available technology to empower the most vulnerable sectors of society and eradicate existing disparities within and among States.

The issue relating to the passage through the Caribbean Sea of ships bearing nuclear material is still unresolved. We are, from time to time, presented with studies and analyses that seek to assure us of the safety of the ships and their cargo. Despite these assurances, we all know that there is no guarantee that international terrorism will continue to ignore such a significant target or that an unthinkable accident would not occur. A major explosion on board one of these ships traversing our region would threaten the survival of surrounding States. The most acceptable solution to the problem is cessation of the trans-shipment of nuclear material through the Caribbean Sea, since, on this issue, any risk is too high.

In your address, Mr. President, upon the opening of the General Assembly, you called for action rather than inaction. This moment in global affairs will require courage and determination as we face the enormous challenges awaiting us. We may not be expected to complete the task, but then, neither are we at liberty to abstain from it.

Mr. Van den Berg (Netherlands), Vice-President, took the Chair.

The Acting President: I give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Jaap de Hoop Scheffer, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands.

Mr. De Hoop Scheffer (Netherlands): The deaths of Sergio Vieira de Mello and his colleagues leave a terrible void. The loss of so many dedicated servants of the United Nations at its headquarters in Baghdad fills us with shock, grief and concern. This atrocity and the other murderous attacks we have seen in the past two years are chilling evidence that terrorists are ruthlessly targeting the civilized world. Terrorism is a direct threat to us all, to humanity as a whole.

Weapons of mass destruction are the other direct threat, an even worse threat if such weapons were to fall into the hands of terrorists.

In addition to these direct threats to peace and security, we are faced with, in the words of Secretary-General Kofi Annan, "soft threats": poverty and hunger, environmental degradation and diseases of mass destruction like HIV/AIDS, malaria and tuberculosis.

What all these threats have in common is that they do not stop at national borders. Their often lethal consequences affect groups of countries, whole continents or even the entire planet. The only way to tackle them is by collective action. Enforcement and implementation are the key.

But do we have the capacity to take such action? Is the existing multilateral system with its institutions and rules capable of responding to the hard threats and soft threats we are facing? I doubt it. Take the growing danger of the proliferation of nuclear weapons. Can we allow a few countries to reject the rules agreed to by 187 other countries? Can we run the risk of countries turning into suppliers of nuclear arms to terrorist organizations? No, we cannot. And if today's rules cannot avert States putting humanity at risk, we must tighten those rules and we must be ready to collectively enforce them.

I therefore welcome President Bush's proposal for a binding Security Council resolution, tightening up the non-proliferation rules. I suggest that we build on existing export control regimes and make them universal and legally binding. This approach would be in line with the successful example of Security Council resolution 1373 (2001), containing binding obligations for States to take action against terrorism. Other elements in a more forceful multilateral system are

greater attention to conflict prevention, better use of sanctions or "smart sanctions", an upgrading of the International Atomic Energy Agency's inspections regime and, as suggested by President Chirac, a permanent instrument for inspections at the disposal of the Security Council.

More robust multilateral action is also needed in our dealings with failed States. I am encouraged by the increased willingness of the international community to take more determined action. Liberia is a test case. The Brahimi report has shown us the right direction. Peacekeeping operations can only be effective if they are based on a strong mandate, fully implemented on the ground and fully backed by the key players in the Security Council. The five permanent members bear a special responsibility for global peace and security. *Noblesse oblige*.

The United Nations is now also at the centre of the debate about Iraq. Let us put our past differences on Iraq behind us. It is crucial now that the international community support the Iraqi people in their reconstruction efforts. I trust that the Security Council will reach agreement, as soon as possible, on what we all want, in other words, stabilization, security and transfer of sovereignty to a legitimate Iraqi government. This will also allow the United Nations and the other multilateral institutions to make their indispensable contributions to a better future for the Iraqi people.

A stronger United Nations is also needed for the effective promotion and protection of human rights. I regret that we do not live up to the expectations of the oppressed. The great dependence of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights on voluntary contributions is a major concern. His office should instead receive a larger allocation from the regular United Nations budget. The promotion and protection of human rights is United Nations core business.

Speaking of human rights, there is no doubt that terrorism itself ranks as one of the most serious threats to democracy and the enjoyment of human rights. Terrorists seek to destroy democracy, freedom and tolerance. If we sacrifice those universal values in the struggle against terrorists, we play into their hands.

If I may speak for a moment as Chairman-in-Office of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), I can assure you that our experience shows that policies aimed at promoting human rights, the rule of law and good governance can reinforce each other as parts of a more comprehensive security strategy. The International Criminal Court is another example of how to ensure that international norms are upheld in cases where national Governments fail to do so.

On the trafficking of human beings, women and children in particular, I share the concerns expressed by President Bush. He was right to draw a comparison with slavery. For the OSCE, the threat posed by the international trafficking of drugs, of small arms and of women and children is a top priority. We have already taken concrete action, adopting the OSCE Action Plan to combat trafficking in human beings as an instrument for protecting our people. This Action Plan could serve as a model for worldwide action.

Yet another reason why we need a robust multilateral system is that we must break the cycles of poverty and violence we witness in many parts of Africa. This implies restoring stability and order as a precondition for reconstruction and development. It also requires an integrated approach. To this end my Government will set up a stability fund to tackle the twin challenges of development and security. Because development and security are closely linked, the Millennium Development Goals should remain at the centre of our policies. The Netherlands remains committed to allocating 0.8 per cent of our gross domestic product to development cooperation and I call on all countries to implement their Monterrey commitments. But development is not just a matter of aid, it will also depend on liberalizing trade. I am disappointed that the World Trade Organization Ministerial Conference in Cancún failed to produce results.

The legitimacy of the decisions of the Security Council is questioned because the composition of the Council no longer reflects today's geopolitical realities. However, expansion is not a solution in itself. Effectiveness can easily fall victim to the quest for legitimacy. Crucial to restored legitimacy is better interaction between the members of the Council and the United Nations membership at large. Members of the Council should represent relevant and broad sections of world opinion.

I agree with the Secretary-General that we need to take a hard look at the existing architecture of international institutions. Many other organizations I know well, such as the OSCE, the European Union

(EU) and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) (and I hope to get to know the last organization even better in the near future), are in the process of redefining their roles in drastically changed circumstances. The United Nations cannot be left behind. Interaction between the United Nations on the one hand, and regional organizations such as the OSCE, the EU and NATO on the other, is growing. There is considerable scope for intensifying that interaction, as is indeed foreseen in the Charter.

As the Italian Presidency of the European Union illustrated in its intervention here some days ago, the United Nations can count on the EU in the quest for robust multilateralism. As a member State of the EU, the Netherlands fully endorses the Presidency's statement. The EU's new emphasis on countering the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction in its common foreign and security policy is an example of how we want our common efforts to be in the vanguard.

Let me now focus on the General Assembly. Take the example of how we deal with the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Let us connect the General Assembly to reality. Instead of dealing with 23 resolutions, should we not try to find our strength in a more focused central message, supported by all, a message that calls upon both Israel and the Palestinians to put an end to the bloodshed and violence and to immediately implement the road map as the only viable way to long-lasting peace? The EU will continue to do all it can, together with its partners in the Quartet, to help Palestinians and Israelis reach that destination. I hope that this Assembly can contribute.

The Assembly should be made more effective. I need not repeat what you all know about overlapping or hardly relevant agenda items, repetitive debates and resolutions and the prevalence of the lowest common denominator. As a contribution to improvement, my country tabled the Greentree report, the result of a seminar involving representatives from a wide circle of countries. The Greentree report aims at restoring the General Assembly to its rightful place as the centre stage for worldwide deliberations on our common problems. We are certain that in that endeavour, we will be able to count on the leadership and wisdom of the President of the General Assembly.

My Government wholeheartedly supports the decision of the Secretary-General to establish a panel of eminent persons. We look forward to his recommendations for next year's session of the Assembly. Meanwhile, we should not sit back and wait. It is upon us Member States to engage now in the debate on the pertinent reform questions the Secretary-General has put to us.

In order to defuse the threats we face and to leave a better world for future generations, we need to do more than talk. We must act and we must act together. We need clear rules and strong institutions — institutions that ensure that the rules of the multilateral game are respected, strengthened and enforced. We need a multilateral system with teeth; we need a multilateral system that works.

The Acting President: I give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Rashid Abdullah Al-Noaimi, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the United Arab Emirates.

Mr. Al-Noaimi (United Arab Emirates) (*spoke in Arabic*): On behalf of the United Arab Emirates, I have the honour to extend to Mr. Hunte and to his friendly country, Saint Lucia, our sincerest congratulations on his election to the presidency of the General assembly at its fifty-eighth session.

I should also like to thank his predecessor, Mr. Jan Kavan, for his valuable efforts and effective leadership of the previous session.

On this occasion, I would also like to express our appreciation to Secretary-General Kofi Annan for his wise leadership and perseverance in his efforts to enhance the role of the United Nations in maintaining peace, security and sustainable development.

Despite our hopes and the great humanitarian expectations that we entertained with the dawn of the new millennium, there remain many regional and international issues that have not been resolved and are a major concern to us all. They represent a serious threat to international peace and security, as well as to the stability, development and prosperity of peoples, all of which depend on respect for and implementation of the norms of international laws, and conventions.

The regrettable events that our world is witnessing today are but the natural aftermath of the previous political era, which was characterized by conflicts, occupation, oppression, injustice, the violation of human rights and wars that led to a wide range of arm races at the expense of human, economic and environmental development. If we are to confront and contain these challenges and their repercussions, it is

important to reform the United Nations and all its main bodies — especially the Security Council, the General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council — as well as to enhance cooperation and coordination between these international organizations and regional organizations.

Maintaining stability and security in the Arab Gulf area is an essential priority, not only for the peoples of the region, but also for the entire world. Accordingly, within the framework of the Gulf Cooperation Council and of bilateral, regional and international relations, the United Arab Emirates has adopted a foreign policy based on peaceful coexistence, confidence-building, good-neighbourliness, mutual respect, non-interference in the internal affairs of others, the settlement of disputes and the ending of occupation by peaceful means.

On the basis of its commitment to these doctrines and the principles of the Charter of the United Nations, the United Arab Emirates believes that the way to end the occupation of its three islands — Greater Tumb, Lesser Tumb and Abu Moussa — by the Islamic Republic of Iran is by peaceful means that would spare the region from the atrocities of warfare from which its people have suffered for the past three decades. Therefore, the United Arab Emirates reiterates its call on the Islamic Republic of Iran to reconsider its position and to respond to the peaceful initiative that we announced a few years ago, which calls on both countries to engage in serious bilateral negotiations or to resort to the International Court of Justice, as has been done in other bilateral issues that have been settled in accordance with the principles of the Charter of the United Nations and the provisions of international law.

The question of the three occupied islands, which belong to the United Arab Emirates, has been on the agenda of the Security Council since their occupation by Iran in 1971. In this regard, we reaffirm the complete sovereignty of the United Arab Emirates over Greater Tumb, Lesser Tumb and Abu Moussa and on their regional air space and waters, the continental shelf and the economic zone of the three islands, which are considered an indivisible part of the regional sovereignty of the United Arab Emirates. The United Arab Emirates calls on the Iranian Government to address this sensitive and important issue in a positive spirit in order to end the occupation. We hope that the current bilateral communications and meetings between the United Arab Emirates and the Islamic Republic of Iran will lead to a solution that will cement their good-neighbourly relations, enhance cooperation and mutual interests between the two countries, and strengthen the foundations of security, stability and prosperity in this important region.

Since the last session of the General Assembly, the world has witnessed many changes in the political and security fields that have had a strong impact on our international relations, especially those related to peace and security in the Arab Gulf region. This has had consequences and repercussions that may undermine the foundations of peace, stability and development in the area and the world.

The United Arab Emirates, which is deeply concerned about the continued suffering of the brotherly Iraqi people and the deterioration of their humanitarian, security, social, economic and environmental conditions, reaffirms that the restoration of security and stability in Iraq and the country's return to the international community will not be achieved without the collective efforts of the regional and international community to help the Iraqi people reform their constitutional and developmental institutions and to enable them to manage their internal affairs and external relations with their neighbours and other countries so that they can play their responsible and historic role in the region.

We therefore reiterate our expression of welcome and support for the efforts made by the provisional Iraqi Governing Council and the interim Iraqi Administration. We hope that the United Nations will play an increasingly important role in resolving the situation in Iraq; in its reconstruction; in maintaining its territorial integrity, unity and the right of its people to self-determination; in the election of its Government; in its political future; and in the exploitation of its natural resources.

The United Arab Emirates has been closely following the dangerous developments in the occupied Palestinian territories. We condemn the policies of targeted killings and closure being carried out by Israel, in violation of all relevant international and humanitarian laws. We therefore call upon the Quartet and on other influential countries to revitalize the peace process and to compel Israel to implement the road map, which stipulates an end to the Israeli occupation and the establishment of a Palestinian State by 2005. The road map also calls on Israel to refrain from building illegal settlements and to ensure the return of the refugees.

We demand that Israel cease placing obstacles in the way of the implementation of the road map — obstacles such as the killing and destruction perpetrated by Israeli occupying forces against Palestinians and their property in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. We also demand that Israel lift the unjust siege on President Yasser Arafat and the Palestinian people, dismantle the separation fence and release Palestinian prisoners in Israeli prisons.

A fair, lasting and comprehensive settlement of the Middle East conflict requires a commitment by Israel to adhere to international resolutions, which are based on the principle of land for peace; the Arab peace initiative, endorsed by the Beirut Summit, including the Syrian and Lebanese tracks; and Israeli withdrawal from all Palestinian and Arab lands occupied since 1967, including Al-Quds Al-Sharif, the Syrian Golan and the Lebanese Shaba'a Farms area.

The Middle East region, including the Arab Gulf, must be freed of all weapons of mass destruction, and Israel must join the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons and subject its nuclear facilities to the safeguards of the International Atomic Energy Agency, pursuant to relevant United Nations resolutions.

The United Arab Emirates condemns all forms and manifestations of terrorism. We call for the mustering of national, regional and international efforts to combat and eradicate such a dangerous phenomenon, because it is exploited by radicals and outlaws as means to achieve their destructive goals.

In this respect, we express our deepest sorrow following the criminal attack perpetrated against the United Nations headquarters, as well as against the Jordanian Embassy in Baghdad and against the Imam Ali mosque in Najaf, which resulted in the killing of Imam Mohammed Baqer Alhakeem and a number of innocent victims. We stand shoulder to shoulder with those countries that have been the targets of terrorist criminal attacks, in particular our brothers in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. We express our support for all the measures taken by Saudi Arabia to eradicate these terrorist activities.

In the meantime, we call on the international community to convene an international conference to tackle terrorism and eradicate its causes and tools. We also reaffirm the importance of respect for human rights, transparency and openness based on mutual respect of the cultural heritage and the beliefs of peoples, so as to avoid creating a fertile breeding ground for frustration and hatred from which the terrorists derive their raison d'être and their motivation.

Despite the numerous international conferences, particularly the World Summit on Sustainable Development and the International Conference on Financing for Development, aimed at tackling the imbalance in international economic relations and its effect on international economic development, the majority of the world's people continue to live in unstable and inhuman conditions, characterized by increased poverty, the spread of disease and illiteracy, because of the increasing economic gap between developed and developing countries. Developed countries must commit to implementing the pledges they made according to international resolutions.

From this perspective, the United Arab Emirates calls on the international community to fulfil its commitment to providing development assistance to poor countries, in particular the least developed countries. International financial and development institutions as well as the private sector should plan strategies geared towards providing financial and development resources in order to implement economic development programmes in developing and poor countries, all within an environmentally friendly framework, ensuring access by such countries to new technologies, in order to alleviate the external debt burden and remove tariffs on international trade, which would benefit all countries of the world.

On this occasion, I cannot fail to point out the confidence placed in the United Arab Emirates by the international community through its hosting of the annual meeting of the heads of the International Monetary Fund and of the World Bank in the Emirate of Dubai, a meeting that concluded its work on 24 September. We are very satisfied with the outcome of that meeting, particularly the special attention it focused on the question of development and cooperation for the purpose of alleviating the impact of poverty and debt burdens around the world.

In conclusion, the grave challenges facing the international community today bolster our conviction more than ever of the importance of adhering to the principles of the Charter of the United Nations and of international law, as our point of reference in resolving regional and international disputes and differences.

We express the hope that the meetings and debates held during this session of the General Assembly will succeed in strengthening the role of the United Nations as a multilateral Organization and in the maintenance of international peace and security.

The Acting President: I give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Habib Ben Yahia, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Tunisia.

Mr. Ben Yahia (Tunisia) (*spoke in Arabic*): It gives me great pleasure to convey to you, Sir, and to your friendly country, Saint Lucia, our sincere congratulations on your election as President of the General Assembly at its fifty-eighth session. I am confident that your great skills and abilities will guarantee the success of our proceedings at this session. I also would like to express to your predecessor, Mr. Jan Kavan, deep appreciation for his remarkable stewardship of the fifty-seventh session.

I would also like to take this opportunity to extend to Mr. Kofi Annan, Secretary-General of the United Nations, our thanks and appreciation for his tireless efforts to strengthen the role of our Organization in order to enable it to attain its objectives of achieving peace, security and development in the world.

Since the opening of the previous Assembly session, the world has witnessed a series of developments that have contributed to the further deterioration of global security and stability. Crises and conflicts are proliferating, while there has been an increase in poverty and exclusion and in the spread of disease in many parts of the world. Faced with this array of challenges, the international community is called upon to assume its responsibilities and take resolute action. All Member States must renew their commitment to the noble principles enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations, work together in the framework of an international consensus to strengthen the role of our Organization in the maintenance of peace and security and find solutions to current international issues. We are convinced that that is the best way to ensure that the world is governed by the principles of dialogue, cooperation and consensus.

The new challenges facing the international community and the necessity of establishing relations based on justice, equity and harmony, demand that we unite our efforts to ensure that the United Nations remains the framework for our common endeavours to preserve peace and security — the embodiment of international law, to which all countries must be committed and which they must implement in a non-selective manner, without double standards.

These new challenges also require the United Nations to enhance its efficiency and improve its working methods, taking into account the noble principles enshrined in the Charter, by strengthening its main organs, particularly the Security Council, which must regain its credibility with regard to the maintenance of international peace and security, and by revitalizing and enhancing the role of the General Assembly in the interests of peace, security and development.

In this regard, we support the Secretary-General's call to accelerate the introduction of necessary reforms, and we stress that Tunisia, which has participated in the past in the debate on these reforms, stands ready to continue to contribute effectively to international efforts aimed at achieving this objective, which is now more urgent than ever.

Mr. Zarif (Islamic Republic of Iran), Vice-President, took the Chair.

We are convinced that the deterioration of the global situation requires the international community to adopt a comprehensive and multidimensional approach, based on the interdependence of peace and security on the one hand, and development on the other. We believe that peace and security cannot prevail throughout the world unless the development needs of all peoples are addressed. We also recognize that development cannot be achieved in the absence of security and peace for all.

Of course the pursuit of such an objective will require all members of the international community to pool their efforts and show greater solidarity so as to eliminate the root causes of tension and to eradicate poverty and deprivation, which are breeding grounds for trouble and instability.

Since the change of 7 November 1987, Tunisia has called for the adoption of such an approach and has presented, at the regional and international levels, numerous initiatives and proposals, whose objective is to build the foundation for a world with a greater capacity to attain the goal of peace, security and development and to spread the values of dialogue, tolerance and solidarity among all peoples.

In this context, President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali of Tunisia called in 1989, from this lofty rostrum, for the conclusion of a pact for peace and progress in the framework of the United Nations, drawing together the countries of the North and the South and based on peace and justice and the strengthening of cooperation among all countries of the world.

All the initiatives and proposals put forward by the President of Tunisia since that date have been consistent with that call, as they stem from the determination of Tunisia and its President to ensure the effectiveness of our country's contribution to addressing issues of peace, security and development, particularly in relation to the phenomenon of terrorism and the means of combating it and to the implementation of mechanisms for conflict resolution in the Arab and African regions.

In line with the comprehensive character of the Tunisian approach, the President of Tunisia has consistently called on the international community to help developing countries strengthen their economies through a number of regional and international initiatives such as those related to debt relief, in particular debt recycling for middle-income countries; the transfer of science and technology to developing countries and a call for the convening of a world summit on the information society.

President Ben Ali also called for the dissemination of the values of solidarity and compassion as a means of contributing to the eradication of poverty, marginalization and exclusion in all parts of the world — a call that led to the establishment of the World Solidarity Fund.

Tunisia, which has succeeded in creating a secure, stable and well-balanced society that is integrated into the mainstream of the modern world, believes that the well-being of humankind is the ultimate objective and, on the basis of its own national experience, that the fight against extremism and terrorism, which constitute a serious threat to the entire world, cannot succeed unless it is comprehensive and multidimensional in nature and takes into account not only the security dimension but also the need to address the root causes of the phenomenon.

We therefore underscore the necessity of working to develop a common international approach to fighting the phenomenon of extremism and terrorism, taking into account all relevant international conventions.

In this context, pending the achievement of the necessary progress in the adoption of a comprehensive international mechanism to fight terrorism, we would like to reiterate Tunisia's call for the conclusion of a code of conduct to fight terrorism, to which all countries adhere and which will include the principles around which a consensus could be built. Such a code of conduct could constitute a common denominator in collectively confronting this phenomenon. An international conference could be convened to lay the groundwork for such a code of conduct.

The wide international support enjoyed by the proposal to establish the World Solidarity Fund testifies to the need for such a mechanism, which is aimed at reducing the suffering, poverty, exclusion and marginalization endured by a great number of peoples throughout the world, particularly in Africa.

While we reiterate our sincere gratitude to Member States for their support for this initiative, we remain convinced that, as the Fund was set up in February 2003 and has become one of the official mechanisms of the United Nations system, Member States will spare no effort in speeding up its operationalization, thus allowing it to begin its activities as soon as possible and thereby contribute to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals. We therefore urge the international community and all relevant actors, including State and private organizations, to mobilize the necessary financial resources for the Fund so as to allow it to fulfil its noble humanitarian objectives. It is also imperative, in this regard, to speed up the establishment of the proposed high-level committee, whose task is to define the strategy of the World Solidarity Fund and to mobilize the resources needed for its activities.

The widening digital gap between industrialized and developing countries requires us to take the necessary practical measures to enable all countries of the world to take advantage of the broad prospects provided by the technological revolution in the field of communications. In that context, Tunisia called for the convening of a World Summit on the Information Society. We are now intensifying our preparation for the second phase of that Summit, which will be held in Tunis in November 2005.

While expressing its determination to contribute effectively to the first phase, which is due to be held in Geneva in December this year, Tunisia will do its

utmost to ensure that the Tunis summit will constitute an opportunity to elaborate a common approach, in order to contribute to strengthening cooperation between all members of the international community and to consolidate the role of information and communication technologies in development. We are confident that the member States that chose Tunisia to host the Summit will do their utmost to make the summit a success.

Convinced of the role of sports in strengthening the bonds of friendship, cooperation and rapprochement between peoples, and taking into account the importance of physical education as an instrument to consolidate the foundations of peace and promote development in the world, Tunisia decided to present to this session of the General Assembly a draft resolution proclaiming the year 2004 an international year of sports and physical education in the service of peace and development. We express the hope that this proposal, which has already received the support of the African Union and the Organization of the Islamic Conference, will get wide support from the international community and other international sports bodies.

The Middle East continues to suffer from a cycle of violence and tension. The road map, which Tunisia supported, revived hope for the resumption of the peace process. However, that hope was soon faced with Israel's insistence on imposing the reality of occupation and continuous military campaigns against the Palestinian people, including the decision to expel President Yasser Arafat, despite the Palestinian Authority's readiness to fulfil its commitments in the framework of the road map. In the face of the deteriorating situation, we believe that the international community, particularly the members of the Quartet, should not allow the will of peace to be defeated and should therefore spare no effort to enhance the peace process.

While reiterating its attachment to the peace process and its determination to contribute effectively to its success, Tunisia stresses the need to respect the legitimacy of the Palestinian Authority and its leadership, chosen freely by the Palestinian people. We also believe that, given the continuing tragic conditions of the Palestinian people, it is high time to heed the call made by President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali during the Extraordinary Arab Summit held in Cairo in October 2000 to provide the Palestinian people with international protection, particularly as that call was supported by many States.

The ongoing suffering of the Iraqi people is a source of great concern and profound preoccupation for the international community. While remaining attached to the principle of the independence and territorial integrity of Iraq, we wish to emphasize the need for the international community to join hands and for the United Nations to assume its central role to ensure that peace and stability prevail in that fraternal country, thus allowing for the start of reconstruction and the return to normal life for the Iraqi people.

In that regard, Tunisia hopes that the adoption of the first steps, which were welcomed by Security Council resolution 1500 (2003), will lead as soon as possible to restoration of the sovereignty of the Iraqi people. Furthermore, while condemning in the strongest possible terms the terrorist attack against the United Nations headquarters in Baghdad, we pay a tribute to the Secretary-General, who, despite the gravity of that painful attack, decided to let the United Nations continue to pursue its efforts of helping the Iraqi people overcome their present predicament.

Tunisia attaches great importance to the various forms of integration and partnership within the regional groupings it belongs to. In that regard, we avail ourselves of this opportunity to express our deep satisfaction following the agreement reached between sisterly Libya and the United States, Great Britain and France on the issues relating to the Lockerbie and Union de transports aériens incidents, following Tripoli's fulfilment of all its commitments under the relevant Security Council resolutions. We have no doubt that, now that the sanctions have been completely lifted, Libya will fully resume its role in the Maghreb and Mediterranean regions, thus contributing to reinvigorating the Arab Maghreb Union, which will help promote more complementarity and integration between the countries of the region and will consolidate the foundations of security, stability and prosperity in the Maghreb, Arab, African and Mediterranean areas.

The settlement of this dispute augurs well, as it coincides with the preparations Tunisia is undertaking to host the first summit of the 5+5 dialogue, to be held in December 2003, among the countries of the Maghreb and the European countries of the western Mediterranean. We look forward to this event as a step towards enhancing partnership between the countries of the region and deepening the values of dialogue, tolerance and moderation among the peoples of that region.

Convinced of the need to strengthen common Arab action and to consolidate the role of the League of Arab States to enable it to attain its noble objectives, Tunisia shall endeavour, during its presidency of the next Arab Summit in 2004, to further strengthen the bonds of cooperation, solidarity and complementarity among the Arab countries.

The most recent African Union Summit, held in Maputo in July 2003, marked the beginning of the launching process of the African Union. The African Union is determined to achieve the objective of revitalizing the African continent and to confront the serious challenges it faces. The Union hopes to get the necessary international support in order to achieve its goals.

Undoubtedly, the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD), which is bringing a new vision for a serious and constructive partnership with the United Nations system, its specialized agencies, the developed countries and other relevant institutions, deserves the support of the international community. Such support constitutes an incentive for the African Union to attempt to meet legitimate African needs and address all aspects of marginalization in our continent.

The difficult global economic environment has had an adverse impact on the economies of the developing countries in general and the African economies in particular. Fierce trade competition and protectionist measures, as well as currency fluctuations and the exacerbation of the debt burden, constitute major constraints that have impeded progress of the developing countries.

In that regard, we emphasize the need for all international partners to show the political will necessary to implement the commitments of the Millennium Development Goals, as well as the outcomes of major United Nations conferences and summits, notably the International Conference on Financing for Development held in Monterrey and the World Summit on Sustainable Development held in Johannesburg, if we are to overcome this difficult situation and provide fresh impetus to development efforts.

The difficult situation we face today should not discourage us or weaken our determination to achieve the objectives of peace, security and stability. We must show patience, resolve and perseverance and collectively pledge to strengthen the United Nations and make this session a new starting point for our Organization in order to enable it to effectively play its role and respond to our collective aspirations for a more secure and stable world.

The Acting President: I now call on His Excellency Mr. Nguyen Dy Nien, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Socialist Republic of Viet Nam.

Mr. Nguyen Dy Nien (Viet Nam): On behalf of the delegation of Viet Nam, I wish to warmly congratulate Julian Hunte on his assumption of the presidency of the fifty-eighth session of the General Assembly. I believe that under his able guidance this session will come to a fruitful conclusion. I also take this opportunity to express our great appreciation for the significant contributions made by Mr. Jan Kavan during the previous session of the General Assembly.

Earlier last month, we were all shocked and shared in the boundless grief over the tragic demise of our dear Sergio Vieira de Mello, United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Iraq, and his colleagues in the barbarous bombing of the United Nations offices in Baghdad. We will not be discouraged by that loss. Instead, we should pursue even further the efforts of the United Nations to help the Iraqi people to restore stability and reconstruct their country.

We are living in a world full of events with profound implications for the various aspects of international life. They include the war in Iraq, the bombing of the United Nations offices in Baghdad, the outbreak of the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS), increased violence in the Middle East, as well as continuing terrorist attacks in various parts of the world. Coupled with poverty, disease, floods, droughts and conflicts, they continue to take many innocent lives. This breaks our hearts and should not be condoned, especially when mankind has entered the third millennium of human civilization. We must make full use of the great achievements registered in the areas of science and technology and economy and trade, uphold the values of civilization, and serve the common development and prosperity of all nations.

Strengthening international peace and security and enhancing development remain our primary task. Only in an environment of peace and stability can nations concentrate their energy to meet the challenges of development and to achieve poverty eradication. Healthy, equitable international relations can be built only on the principles of the United Nations Charter

and international law, in particular the principle of respect for national independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity and the principle of non-interference in the internal affairs of States.

Development cooperation and international economic and trade relations can be built only when all participate on an equal footing, on the basis of mutual benefit and with favourable assistance to developing countries. However, there continue to be certain egoistic tendencies that are contrary to that good. Protectionist measures, including anti-dumping measures, have been imposed to prevent developing countries' products from entering developed countries' markets. That runs counter not only to World Trade Organization (WTO) agreements but also to normal trade practices.

A typical case was that of the recent unfair lawsuit against the sale of Viet Nam's catfish in the United States market. The same story recurs in the case of cotton-growers in Burkina Faso and again in the case of indigenous cultivators of medicinal herbs in Brazil. These examples should serve as a further lesson that developing countries will always be at a disadvantage in the current international trade system, as the Secretary-General himself recently observed. By the same token, the failure to reach agreement at the fifth WTO Ministerial Conference in Cancún is truly regrettable. We must enhance efforts to restructure the world trade and financial systems to make them more democratic and open, giving developing countries a better chance.

Despite the considerable efforts by the United Nations to achieve the goals set out in the Millennium Declaration, there is still a long way to go to meet common needs and expectations. Today, global problems increasingly affect human security and survival. The SARS outbreak and AIDS were examples of how devastating such problems can be.

We must be resolute in solving global problems, especially those related to development, poverty eradication and disease prevention. Priority should be given to building cooperative frameworks based on reliable partnerships, mutual respect, shared responsibility and the serious undertaking of commitments. Practical and effective measures must be taken to pursue the United Nations Millennium Development Goals and the commitments made at various international conferences. In that regard, we welcome the efforts of the Secretary-General to elaborate a road map for the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals. We also call upon developed countries to better fulfil the commitment of allocating 0.7 per cent of gross national product to official development assistance.

Multilateralism is crucial to resolving global issues. The United Nations, the universal Organization, continues to play an important role in the fields of peace and development and in building healthy international relations; to meet the confidence and expectations of nations, it must do so more effectively and practically. That requires a stronger and more democratic United Nations and Security Council, ensuring the better representation of the developing countries and those able to make a positive contribution to common objectives. I wish to reaffirm Viet Nam's support for Japan, Germany, India and other capable members from various continents being among the future permanent members of a reformed Security Council.

Following the events of 11 September 2001, the world has made great efforts to combat terrorism. The message is very clear: terrorism must be condemned and eliminated from human civilization. As this common fight may be long and arduous, we need to cooperate on the basis of the principles of the United Nations Charter, as well as to join in an endeavour to solve, inter alia, the problems of poverty, injustice and oppression, which give rise to terrorism.

Viet Nam supports international efforts aimed at disarmament and at the peaceful resolution of conflicts on the basis of respect for the sovereignty and legitimate interests of the parties concerned. We call for an end to embargoes and sanctions imposed against other countries, especially the unilateral embargo against Cuba that for many decades has caused its people to endure untold suffering.

Peace, security and reconstruction are now the most urgent tasks in Iraq. Viet Nam reaffirms its support for Iraq's independence and sovereignty. We hope that stability will soon be restored and that a Government chosen by the Iraqi people will be established at an early date so that they can focus on national reconstruction and development in keeping with their self-determination. The United Nations should continue its worthy, active role in resolving the Iraqi issue and in reconstructing the country. In that regard, Viet Nam has decided to contribute humanitarian assistance to the Iraqi people.

Viet Nam reaffirms its consistent support for the just cause and inalienable rights of the Palestinian people. We call upon the parties concerned to exercise restraint, to persevere in negotiation and to accelerate their pace on the road to a just and durable peace in the Middle East that takes due account of the legitimate interests of the parties. Any unilateral action can only worsen the already volatile situation in the region.

Viet Nam supports peaceful efforts aimed at denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula. We hope that the negotiations initiated through the six-party talks in Beijing last August will lead to a satisfactory conclusion for the sake of peace, stability and development on the Peninsula, in the region and in the rest of the world.

In our region, faced with complex and rapid developments and challenges in the international and regional landscape, the Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN) has produced new initiatives and concrete steps to strengthen its solidarity, resilience and equitable development while further intensifying its relations with friends and partners abroad. At its forthcoming Summit, to be held early next month in Bali, Indonesia, ASEAN will redouble its efforts to realize ASEAN Vision 2020, the Hanoi Plan of Action and the Hanoi Declaration on narrowing the development gap for closer ASEAN integration.

As an outward-looking association, ASEAN continues to attach great importance to broadening and deepening its relations with other countries. China, Russia and India will accede to the ASEAN Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in South-East Asia, thus making the Treaty the code of conduct in inter-State relations. Having adopted the Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea, ASEAN and China are embarking on a search for concrete ways to implement the Declaration, thus contributing to confidence and cooperation in that important part of the world. In the economic field, ASEAN has been discussing closer economic partnership, including a possible free trade agreement, with its dialogue partners — the United States, the European Union, Russia and India, to name only a few.

Viet Nam consistently pursues a foreign policy of national independence, self-reliance, openness, diversification and multilateralization of international relations, and being a friend and reliable partner in the international community. Along those lines, Viet Nam has increasingly enhanced friendly and cooperative relations with other countries as well as with regional and international organizations. At present, we are actively preparing for Viet Nam's early admission to the World Trade Organization. With an annual economic growth rate of approximately 7 per cent, a favourable and secure investment environment, hospitable people, beautiful landscapes and other rewarding discoveries, Viet Nam continues to be a most attractive country for investors and tourists. Later this year, we will host the South-East Asian Games, the largest sports event in the region. Next will be the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) Summit in 2004, followed by the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) Summit in 2006. We are confident that we will live up to expectations.

Today's challenges, both old and new, are becoming global; they require measures of a more global and multilateral nature. The United Nations therefore plays an important role in coordinating international efforts to effectively respond to those challenges and to work for peace and development. In that regard, the principles of the United Nations Charter must be upheld, and their actual implementation must be ensured. For its part, Viet Nam, as a responsible Member State and reliable partner, will continue to contribute actively to that common endeavour.

The Acting President: I now call on His Excellency Mr. Jean Ping, Minister of State and Minister for Foreign Affairs, Cooperation and la Francophonie of Gabon.

Mr. Ping (Gabon) (*spoke in French*): Permit me at the outset to express to Assembly President Julian Hunte the congratulations of my country, Gabon, on his election to the presidency of the General Assembly at this session. Indeed, his election has symbolic value, since, through him, Saint Lucia has become — as he himself said — the smallest country ever to have occupied that high office. Is that not a perfect illustration of the universal vocation of the Organization, which recognizes the equality and rights of all its Members, small and large, but also their common responsibility in the conduct of the world's affairs? Gabon expresses to him its wishes for success in leading this session, and we assure him of our full cooperation. We also congratulate Mr. Jan Kavan, who preceded Mr. Hunte in his office, on the work that he accomplished. In addition, we thank the Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan, for the self-sacrifice and

courage with which he is leading the Organization at this time of grave world turbulence.

The extreme seriousness of the situation facing the world today sometimes leads the United Nations, when States are unable to carry out responsibilities that in principle devolve to them, to assume those responsibilities.

As the United Nations carries out its difficult mission, its authority, unfortunately, is quite often sorely tested, and the very lives of its personnel are threatened. The tragic death of Sergio Vieira de Mello, one of the torch-bearers of the ideals of the United Nations, and other staff members in Baghdad on 19 August is a dreadful reminder of just how fragile international peace and security are. Nevertheless, despite the delicate nature of the situation, the activities of the United Nations must be pursued in Iraq to assist in the reconstruction of the country.

Beyond Iraq, the future of the entire Middle East region must be at the centre of all our attention. The road map remains, despite current threats to its enforcement, the sole hope to restore peace between the parties to the conflict and sustainable regional balance to the Middle East. Gabon urges the two parties to end the violence and resume their dialogue.

Despite the persistence of some hotbeds of tension, the overall situation in Africa has witnessed positive changes. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the peace process has begun to be implemented with the creation in June 2003 of a Transitional Government, whose chief mission is the establishment of new democratic institutions and preparations for elections.

It goes without saying that the security and stability of the country continues to depend on that of the entire Great Lakes region. This is why Gabon ardently desires the completion of the Arusha process in Burundi. After a period of uncertainty, the Central African Republic is also restoring peace, particularly thanks to specific pacification measures taken by the country's new authorities.

To complement their efforts, the Central African Economic and Monetary Community, which met in Libreville in June 2003, decided to make an ad hoc contribution of 5 billion francs CFA to the Central African Republic.

For its part, Gabon has always actively worked for peacekeeping and peace-building in Africa. This was recently demonstrated again in São Tomé and Príncipe, where the good offices of President Bongo and his African peers, particularly those from the Economic Community of Central African States, contributed to the restoration of constitutional order in the country.

Unfortunately, these welcome events are at variance with our inability to react promptly to some crisis situations that jeopardize collective security and cause gross violations of human rights. We must assume a two-fold duty today: to strengthen our collective means of conflict prevention and, when those efforts do not obtain results, to have the capacity to react swiftly to contain armed conflicts before their escalation brings about new humanitarian disasters, as was recently the case in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Liberia.

African countries have shown their ability to manage crises on many occasions. But their will is most often impeded by the scarcity of human resources and lack of appropriate logistical means. To facilitate the prompt deployment of peacekeeping forces in these regions, should we not establish, under the auspices of the United Nation, a partnership between African countries and the developed countries that provide logistical support.

Because many conflicts are rooted in poverty, any effort to resolve them must be based on the quest for efficient solutions to the problems inherent in underdevelopment. The Monterrey Consensus, reaffirmed during the Johannesburg Summit, is based on the recognition that financing for development is a crucial element for an international strategy for sustainable development. The drop in private international investment in developing countries is liable to hinder them from truly recovering. Moreover, many of these countries, in particular those known as medium-income countries like Gabon, continue to devote huge resources to repay external debt. Gabon remains convinced that only a courageous strategy to defer or cancel debt would enable the economic recovery of the countries involved.

The HIV/AIDS pandemic, which has become a development problem, also deserves our attention. The disease is now the leading cause of death among women and the young in Africa. In other words, its main victims are our nations' hope. We welcome the

fact that the high-level plenary debate that took place last week at United Nations Headquarters itself reaffirmed the commitment of the international community to combat this horrifying disease.

The ills that the world is facing should prompt us to identify the structural causes and find the best way to respond. This is particularly true with respect to the fight against international terrorism. One vital stage in this process is the establishment of a legal framework conducive to effective international cooperation.

We must finalize without delay the negotiations to adopt a universal convention against international terrorism in all its forms, including the issue of the acquisition of arsenals of weapons of mass destruction by terrorist groups.

The positive forces that drive our world towards greater integration and solidarity are increasingly jeopardized by growing threats. Because the new challenges of our world have a global impact, we must respond collectively. Only close coordination and active multilateral cooperation will enable us to meet them. It is within the United Nations, a high-level forum for dialogue and cooperation, that we can achieve this objective.

To do so, as we have stressed during the previous session, we must strengthen our Organization, particularly by restoring the role of the General Assembly and reforming the Security Council. We agree on the principle. May we thus have the courage and will to harmonize our views to attain this ideal of change and strengthen the multilateral dimension of our Organization.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Halldór Ásgrímsson, Minister for Foreign Affairs and External Trade of Iceland.

Mr. Ásgrímsson (Iceland): Allow me at the outset to congratulate the President on his election to the presidency of this General Assembly. The role of the President in providing overall leadership to the Assembly is crucial and I am confident he will guide us wisely through the complex tasks ahead of us.

A month from now, a group of young people will gather at the University of Iceland to take part in a model United Nations conference. It is good to see such enthusiasm for the ideals of the United Nations among young people — as well as a desire to experiment with how the United Nations machinery works in practice. But I wonder whether their model will accurately reflect how our United Nations works. I am concerned that, if it does, will it increase or dampen their enthusiasm?

If they were to model the General Assembly, I suspect that their model would contrast in a number of ways with the real thing. Their agenda would be more concise. They would concentrate on pure and more immediate issues of urgency. They would have little time for often-repeated resolutions whose relevance is chiefly historical. They would not allow such items to crowd out more immediate matters. They would address the world as it is, not the world of yesteryear. To be honest, I am worried that the more accurately their United Nations model reflected the real thing, be it the General Assembly or the Security Council, the more difficult it would be to explain to those young idealists our purpose and convince them of our effectiveness.

As already stated by my Danish colleague, on behalf of the Nordic countries, I would very much like to welcome the proposal of the Secretary-General to establish a high-level panel of eminent personalities to make recommendations on issues ranging from peace and security to reform of United Nations structures. The General Assembly has tremendous achievements to its credit. It is, as we affirmed in our Millennium Declaration, the chief deliberative policy-making and representative organ of the United Nations. The achievements of the General Assembly in international norm-setting and in the establishment of an international legal framework is undisputed. Its potential is great but, as the young people at our United Nations model would bluntly point out, it needs fixing.

If we believe the General Assembly is where deliberation should be carried out, let us ensure that the agenda and procedures allow debate and deliberation to take place in an interactive manner. If we believe that it is the chief policy-making body, let us ensure that it develops policy, perhaps by linking debate more closely with the decision-making process. Policy needs to be followed-up; we need to do more on implementation. My delegation will contribute actively and constructively in the forthcoming deliberations on reforms of the General Assembly during this session.

Our young people at the United Nations model next month will in fact be modelling the Security Council. I suspect that they will raise some questions about the composition of that body. Iceland is seriously

concerned with the slow progress in the open-ended working group. Though it provides, for the time being, the appropriate forum for continued dialogue, Iceland would welcome any additional initiatives to further intensify the process towards satisfactory resolution of this important matter.

The Icelandic position on the reform of the Security Council is on record. It is essential that the membership of the Council better reflect the membership of the United Nations as a whole. At the same time, the efficiency of the Council must be preserved. Further steps should be taken to increase transparency in the decision-making process, in order to build on the welcome steps already taken by the Council.

Iceland supports an increase in both permanent and non-permanent seats at the Council. New permanent members should have the same rights and obligations as the current permanent members. The veto right should be restricted and an obligation to state the reason for its use should be established, including why a permanent member considers a matter to be of vital importance.

Iceland has, for the first time, put forward its candidacy for membership of the Security Council for the years 2009 and 2010. We see participation in the Security Council as a logical expression of our determination to fulfil our responsibilities within the United Nations and contribute as an active member of the international community.

The promotion and protection of human rights must be a central concern of all United Nations activities. In this regard, much more needs to be done to implement our commitment regarding the rights of women and the rights of the child. Iceland has signed the United Nations Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons and has enacted legislation against trafficking in human beings. Iceland is working against the trafficking of women through a common campaign with the other Nordic countries and the Baltic States. The Icelandic campaign will focus on informing and increasing awareness among the public about this issue.

We should be especially aware of the implications for human rights of new threats and new policies. In particular, we must ensure that fundamental human rights are not violated in our counter-terrorist effort, as has been underlined by the Secretary-General.

In Iraq, the United Nations itself has recently been the target of two terrorist attacks. I would like to use this opportunity to express the most sincere condolences on behalf of the Icelandic Government to the United Nations and the families of the United Nations officials who lost their lives. I would also like to wish those who were wounded full recovery.

The United Nations and the Security Council in particular must address the issue of Iraq. Iceland, along with many other Member States, is contributing to Iraq's reconstruction and will continue to do so. The situation will demand all our resourcefulness and a concerted effort at cooperation by all parties in the Security Council to ensure that the people of Iraq are assured the destiny they deserve. This destiny should encompass peace and democracy, affording equal rights and justice to all Iraqi citizens.

On terrorists, renewed efforts must be made to reach an agreement on a universal definition during this General Assembly. Such a definition would make the fight against terrorists more effective.

It is estimated that close to 90 per cent of victims in today's armed conflicts are civilians, the majority of whom are women and children. Women and girls experience conflicts differently than men because of their status in society. Their rights must be protected in situations of armed conflict and we must ensure that women play a central role in conflict prevention, peacekeeping and peace-building. United Nations Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) lays the ground rules for this to happen and must be implemented in all of its aspects.

It is our role to ensure that globalization benefits all countries, not least through targeted development cooperation. Sub-Saharan Africa will continue to be the focus of our bilateral development cooperation while we will also increase our contribution and involvement in multilateral development cooperation, especially through the United Nations Development Programme, the United Nations Population Fund, the United Nations Children's Fund, the United Nations Development Fund for Women and the World Food Programme.

I just returned, like many others, from Cancún, where we had difficult discussions on correcting the trade rules so that developing countries can operate on a more level playing field in world trade. This work is vital and we must push on with it. With determination we can break through the impasse that we reached in Cancún.

Iceland is one of the many island States in the world whose well-being and development is crucially affected by the state of the marine environment. Sustainable harvesting of living marine resources is the mainstay of our economy. Resolution 57/141, on Oceans and the Law of the Sea, which was adopted during our last session, provides for the establishment of a regular process for the global reporting and assessment of the state of the marine environment, commonly referred to as Global Marine Assessment, a concept that was initiated by Iceland in 1999.

An intergovernmental meeting should be convened in 2004 to decide upon the modalities of this process and negotiate an agreement between United Nations agencies. It is our sincere hope that such a meeting could turn out to be fruitful in the process of the establishment of the Global Marine Assessment.

We must craft for ourselves a United Nations which is task-oriented, representative, focused and coordinated. I believe strongly that the United Nations should not only be a place where we can talk about what we want to do, it must also be the place and instrument to get things done. We have taken note of the Secretary-General's call for changes in our institution by 2005.

There are varying opinions on how the United Nations should operate, but I believe there is a general recognition that the United Nations is, and must remain, the key forum in which we exercise our collective responsibility. At the Millennium Summit, heads of State and Government reaffirmed their faith in the Organization and its Charter as indispensable foundations of a more peaceful, prosperous and just world. They defined our priorities for this century and resolved to make the United Nations a more effective instrument for pursuing all of these priorities. It is up to us, the Member States, to make it possible for the United Nations to realize these objectives.

The Acting President: I now call on His Excellency Mr. Fiorenzo Stolfi, Minister for Foreign and Political Affairs of San Marino.

Mr. Stolfi (San Marino) (*spoke in Italian; English text provided by the delegation*): On behalf of the Government of the Republic of San Marino, let me congratulate Mr. Julian Hunte on his election to the presidency of the fifty-eighth session of the General Assembly. His election brings us great satisfaction since he also represents a small country, Saint Lucia, like ours.

I also wish to express my country's appreciation for the fruitful work and remarkable abilities of former Assembly President Jan Kavan. It has been a privilege for us to cooperate with him.

I cannot start my speech without mentioning the cowardly attacks on the United Nations offices in Baghdad, which took a heavy toll of lives including that of Sergio Vieira de Mello, Special Representative of the United Nations Secretary-General in Iraq.

On behalf of the Government and people of San Marino, I take this opportunity to reiterate our most sincere condolences to the Secretary-General and the families of the victims. Furthermore, we would like to express our deep appreciation to the United Nations for the fundamental role it is playing in Iraq during this difficult transition period for the Iraqi people. The necessary conditions for social and economic development will be established only through security and stability, independence and democracy, the rule of law and respect for human rights.

In light of the above, I wish to express the hope that the transitional Iraqi Governing Council, welcomed and supported by the Security Council, may operate efficiently so that Iraq can fully enjoy its right to self-determination, its own sovereignty and establish a democratic and representative Government, internationally recognized and able to guarantee the conditions necessary for the country's reconstruction.

We also hope that the United Nations may further strengthen its active humanitarian and civil role in favour of the Iraqi population, so as to contribute to the rebirth of that nation through democracy and development. We hope that all countries cooperating in Iraq to improve security and order, under the aegis of the United States of America, after assuring a decisive contribution to the liberation of the country from the previous regime, will reach an agreement with this Organization.

To this end, the drafting of a new Security Council resolution, the outcome of a lively debate that is going on now, would be a major political and diplomatic achievement. It would definitely pave the way to democracy and progress in Iraq and embody the will of many different Governments under the aegis of the United Nations.

In line with its tradition of solidarity, and as demonstrated in recent years through its support of humanitarian projects in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, the Middle East and in several African countries, often in the context of ad hoc programmes and United Nations special missions, my country will be pleased to contribute to the reconstruction process in Iraq. For the achievement of this objective, the forthcoming conference on the reconstruction of Iraq is particularly interesting.

The tragic, painful and unforgettable events of 11 September 2001 have also marked the proliferation of international terrorism and the escalation of terrorist attacks.

Today's gathering in this important forum is a clear indication of our country's position and its significance is increased by the universal character of this meeting.

The creation of the United Nations nearly 60 years ago, at the end of Second World War, attested to a unanimous desire for lasting peace and justice. I believe that at the beginning of the third millennium it is the responsibility of the Organization to reflect effectively the will of States to fulfil that original commitment and keep its original spirit alive through dialogue, mediation and cooperation. Conscious of this, San Marino reaffirms its decision to reject all forms of terrorism and to contribute fully to its defeat, as testified to by the Republic's accession to several international instruments of the United Nations and European organizations.

Likewise, San Marino has promptly followed up on Security Council resolution 1373 (2001) and will continue to monitor terrorism at the national level, as can be noted by the implementation of the guidelines to combat the phenomenon of terrorism and its related aspects.

Unfortunately, it is evident that terrorism, aside from being inspired by fanaticism and fundamentalism, is too often linked to underdevelopment and injustice; their victims can, in turn, become instruments of violence and oppression. However, terrorism can also be countered through the active support of international cooperation programmes to overcome disparities, poverty, discrimination, the violation of the rights of individuals and peoples, a total absence of opportunities, and, as a result, hopelessness, in particular among the young, who are the future of mankind.

Our collective efforts to restore favourable conditions for dialogue and mutual acceptance must not be weakened by the growing concern of persistent, serious obstacles to the road map for peace in the Middle East, where negotiations and agreements are being jeopardized by renewed terrorist attacks, hatred and retaliation. We are convinced that the Israeli and Palestinian peoples must be ensured the indisputable right to live freely in their own territory, where they can exercise their full sovereignty in security and peace.

The success of the globalization process under way will ultimately depend on achieving peace and development for all. Within the framework of effective global cooperation, the role played by San Marino is inextricably linked to its tradition of freedom, independence and democracy. Those principles, which have characterized the Republic's 1700 years of existence, continue to inspire its international policy today.

In 1854 San Marino became the first European country to ban the death penalty. My country believes that this issue, which is so important and topical, must remain a top priority for the General Assembly, even though it is not on the agenda for this session.

In the field of human rights, the ethics of diversity requires the acceptance of the human condition. In that spirit, San Marino has followed with special attention the negotiations within the working group for the drafting of an international convention on the rights of persons with disabilities.

San Marino continues to pay great attention to the follow-up given to initiatives on HIV/AIDS being carried out by the United Nations and to the search for adequate responses so as to prevent the spread of new epidemics such as Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS). San Marino is also following with great interest the work of the working group for the drafting of an international convention against the reproductive cloning of human beings, spurred by the conviction that the cloning of human beings is an immoral and inhuman degeneration of biotechnological development and that such an abhorrent practice would be contrary to human dignity. The important ethical and moral implications of this issue cannot be separated from purely scientific questions. We hope that the United Nations will continue to strive for the protection of the fundamental rights of human beings.

Additionally, in the area of human rights, San Marino recently extended a standing invitation to the

Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights to visit the Republic whenever necessary in order better to carry out its mandate.

I wish to recall that San Marino was the first Western European country to ratify the Statute of the International Criminal Court, confident that the Court would satisfy the widespread desire for justice and put an end to impunity for the perpetrators of the most serious crimes against the international community as a whole. Let me also express our best wishes to the Court, which is composed of authoritative judges, and convey our hope that it will now be able to work in accordance with the objectives of justice, security and peace on which it is based. We are confident its work will be fruitful and that it will always act independently and impartially.

All the objectives set out in the Millennium Declaration could be achieved if an additional $50 billion per year were granted for development assistance, at a time when global military expenditures total $850 billion. We also wish to express our appreciation for the positive achievements of United Nations peacekeeping missions deployed to many areas of the world afflicted by conflicts. Such results should encourage Governments to increase their support for those missions, which promote lasting, sustainable peace and the re-establishment of democracy and the rule of law.

San Marino will continue to participate in joint action for the total elimination of anti-personnel mines. In that context, San Marino urges countries that have not yet done so to accede to the Ottawa Convention.

The tenth anniversary of the International Year of the Family in 2004 will provide further incentive to reflect on and analyse the living conditions of our populations, paying particular attention to children, the elderly and the most vulnerable in our societies. Such groups deserve greater consideration from society. Society must promote effective projects for education, solidarity and adequate support.

Only a few days ago, the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child reviewed San Marino's initial report on its implementation of the provisions of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The relevant measures now in force will soon be supplemented by new ones in support of the family.

In underlining the validity of the reform programme started by the Secretary-General, we deem it necessary to continue efforts to reform the General Assembly, which is the most representative body of our Organization. Indeed, the Assembly should enjoy greater authority. We hope that agreement can also be reached on Security Council reform, and San Marino reiterates its support for the inclusion of a larger number of non-permanent members, in order to make the Council more representative and democratic.

Let me stress once again my country's appreciation for and commitment to activities carried out by the United Nations in building a world of peace, solidarity and development.

It is in that spirit that this morning I signed three important international instruments: the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, the Framework Convention on Tobacco Control, recently adopted at the fifty-sixth Assembly of the World Health Organization and the Second Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, aimed at abolishing the death penalty.

We need to continue our action at the international level despite all the difficulties and tensions that exist, bearing in mind that our joint efforts are essential to finding a solution to the emergencies and concerns of today. Bringing about the necessary changes, we will be able to reconfirm the validity of the basic principles of this Organization. We will responsibly set the conditions for our future and thus meet the expectations of our peoples and our hearts.

While expressing my best wishes to you, Mr President, to the Secretary-General and to all United Nations officers, as well as to all Member States, I assure them that San Marino will be at their side in meeting all of these challenges.

The Acting President: I now call on Her Excellency Mrs. Soledad Alvear Valenzuela, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Chile.

Mrs. Alvear Valenzuela (Chile) (*spoke in Spanish*): I congratulate Mr. Hunte on his election as President of this Assembly. As the Foreign Minister of St. Lucia, a member of the Latin American and Caribbean community, he can be especially assured of the full cooperation of the delegation of Chile.

The events of 11 September 2001, the crisis in Iraq, the conflict in the Middle East and the attack on the United Nations in Baghdad all pose enormous challenges for the international community. Tensions

have arisen over the way in which we have responded to some of these crises, but opportunities have also been created for joint action in new areas. We must confront these challenges with seriousness of purpose and a collective approach.

The Secretary-General has expressed his concern at the differing perceptions of the new and old threats and the urgent need to develop a programme of security aimed at building a common destiny. The United Nations will be what its Member States wish it to be. The success of the Organization will be the success of its Members and its failure will be the responsibility of none other than its Member States. The United Nations can and must play a central role in building a common destiny based on universally shared principles and values. The renewal of the United Nations is therefore an urgent task that must be approached from a lofty political and ethical perspective and not from the bureaucratic standpoint that has led to stagnation, empty rhetoric and frustration of the desire for change.

According to our Charter, faith in human rights is a core value of every society and culture. It is essential for us vigorously to promote its universality. We note with concern how the progress made by mankind in promoting these values is accompanied by reversals that frustrate the sense of ethics that we wish to impart to the global community.

The work of the United Nations must continue to be a guarantee for the promotion and protection of human rights and for the strengthening of a culture that guides the conscience of each individual, each people and each nation. Democracy is consistent with the purposes and principles of this Organization.

In our region, we have made progress towards the inculcation of these values. The historic Santiago Commitment to Democracy of 1991 culminated in the adoption of the Inter-American Democratic Charter and has been complemented by the Declaration of Santiago on Democracy and Public Trust: A New Commitment to Good Governance for the Americas, which was adopted at the thirty-third General Assembly of the Organization of American States, held in Chile in June this year. In that instrument, we reaffirmed the vital role of multilateral cooperation in promoting democratic governance. This effort is an example of how international cooperation can help to strengthen the universal value of democracy.

Chile's commitment to democracy goes beyond our region. We and other countries are part of the Community of Democracies, an initiative aimed at promoting and strengthening this system of coexistence throughout the world. We hope to work in the United Nations in pursuit of these objectives.

International peace and security continue to be key concerns of our Organization. The sacrifice of the Brazilian and Latin American Sergio Vieira de Mello, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General in Baghdad, and of his colleagues reaffirms our commitment to working on behalf of peace.

The United Nations must play a more substantive role in the future of Iraq. We must work to ensure the rapid restoration of sovereignty to the Iraqi people so that they can freely build their future. Chile stands ready to continue to work in the Security Council with an approach that will permit progress to be made towards the consensus that is needed to improve the conditions of security and to establish a clear timetable for political transition in that country.

Security must guarantee people a life free from threats. Human security thus emerges as a distinctive feature and a prerequisite for a world without fear. We share the ideas of the Secretary-General for the elaboration of a programme of common security that will permit us to overcome the differences that have arisen in dealing with the increasing fears of our global community.

Globalization has created new opportunities for the peoples of the world, but it has also created imbalances as a result of unequal access to the advantages that it offers. The equity perspective must therefore be a key component of this programme of security. Development in the globalized world can no longer be sustained only in terms of technological innovation and economic growth. Progress must be aimed at ensuring that technological development is placed at the service of integration and collective prosperity.

In this spirit, we look forward to broad participation in the Global Biotechnology Forum, to be held in the Chilean city of Concepción in March 2004, and to an outcome that will help to further strengthen international cooperation in one of the most dynamic fields of science and technology.

Our political and economic multilateral institutions were created in a different historical period. We must now

demonstrate our capacity to adapt them to better respond to the challenges of the twenty-first century. Our main concern today must be how to overcome our immobility and embark upon a process of renewal. The method used thus far has not yielded the desired results. It is therefore necessary to explore new alternatives.

We warmly welcome the initiative of the Secretary-General to establish a group of eminent personalities to elaborate a proposal for submission to the Organization. It is essential to address the weaknesses of the General Assembly, the Security Council and the Economic and Social Council. We must also reflect on what new functions could be entrusted to the Trusteeship Council. We must strengthen the dialogue between these organs and extend it to other international organizations, including the Bretton Woods institutions, the World Trade Organization and regional organizations. In order to go forward in this process of renewal, we must be able to utilize the full potential of the Charter, which has not been fully exploited.

The Security Council has recently gone through a critical period. We have witnessed the difficulty it has had in discharging the responsibilities entrusted by the Charter to this vital organ for the maintenance of international peace and security. We are in favour of its revitalization, in order that an appropriate balance can be achieved between representativity and effectiveness.

Reform must give consideration to the addition of new members, both permanent and non-permanent, and include a review of the veto. This process can be complemented by mechanisms that will allow, within the framework of the Charter, more active participation by countries that are not members of the Council.

It is also necessary more effectively to involve the principal organs in the consideration of issues affecting international peace and security. This must be done in a coordinated manner through the effective application of the Charter, as provided for in Article 15 thereof.

It is necessary, too, more actively to involve regional organizations and arrangements in efforts to maintain peace and security by applying Chapter VIII of the Charter. The region of the Americas has an institutional structure and various coordination mechanisms that can be used to contribute to the fulfilment of the purposes of the United Nations. The experience of the Organization of American States is pertinent in this regard.

The General Assembly must undertake a process of revitalization in order to be able to play its role effectively as the principal deliberative, normative and representative organ of the United Nations.

The Assembly has a multiplicity of items on its agenda and has adopted many resolutions, most of which remain unimplemented, thereby affecting the effectiveness and credibility of the system as a whole. We must have the political will to implement our decisions. In short, we must strengthen the capacity of the Assembly to assume political leadership. We must also promote the establishment of regional agendas that facilitate agreements and global consensus.

The United Nations must play a key role in the promotion of equitable development by increasing the Organization's capacity to influence the design and implementation of national and international public policies in the economic and social spheres.

The process of revitalization of the Economic and Social Council must be aimed at repositioning that organ. This will require the streamlining of its agenda, methods of work and membership, and the strengthening of its relationship with the Security Council, as provided for in Article 65 of the Charter, through its assumption of a role in the prevention and containment of threats originating in social problems.

We must seek to ensure that the search for consensus does not prevent this forum from reaching the necessary substantive agreements required for the achievement of the purposes and principles of the United Nations.

Chile, from the southern part of the world, will continue to shoulder its responsibility to make a contribution to the international community.

The United Nations is a unique and indispensable forum for building a world of peace and development for all. Its core values must inspire efforts for a renewal that will permit the Organization, in the building of our common destiny, to rise to the challenges of the century upon which we have just embarked.

The Acting President: I now call on His Excellency Mr. João Bernardo de Miranda, Minister for External Relations of Angola.

Mr. Miranda (Angola) (*spoke in Portuguese; English text provided by the delegation*): I would like to start by congratulating Mr. Julian Hunte on his

election to the presidency of the General Assembly at its fifty-eight session. We wish him great success in the fulfilment of this difficult and lofty task.

The current session is taking place at one of the most troubled times in our era. The recent events in the Gulf region were a severe test of the capacity and readiness of the United Nations to provide appropriate responses to the challenges presently faced by the international community. The impact of these events somehow diminished the cohesion of our world Organization and weakened trust among its Members. There was a failure in the international security system, which puts us in the position of needing immediately to make it more effective.

In fact, the present international security system, created after the last great war — despite having to date prevented the outbreak of a new world conflict — has shown signs of an incompatibility in the global collective security interests of the Members of the United Nations in relation to the new challenges of this millennium.

We are in urgent need of an integrated system capable of dealing effectively with the major threats to international stability at the outset of this twenty-first century, specifically terrorism and international organized crime; weapons of mass destruction; internal conflicts, which, unfortunately, continue to plague the African continent in particular; generalized poverty; and HIV/AIDS.

Terrorism is today the most direct threat to the security of our countries, as can be seen from the attacks that in the past two years have killed thousands of civilians in the United States, Russia, Africa and Asia.

With regard to armed conflicts, the situation continues to require urgent attention. During the last decade, approximately one third of African States were either directly or indirectly affected by internal conflicts, which resulted in costs as high as $15 billion a year, and caused hundreds of thousands of deaths, massive displacements of people, famine and malnutrition, and the spread of diseases such as HIV/AIDS.

The prevalence of conflicts in Africa is not only the result of the divisions inherited from the post-colonial period and the cold war and of ethnic and religious differences. It is also a consequence of factors such as the fragility of national institutions, the marginalization of the African continent from the world economy, the illegal exploitation of natural resources and the resulting arms proliferation, and the weak monitoring of national borders. This situation must be swiftly reversed, since it can endanger the future of millions of Africans and increase the risk of certain areas of the continent's becoming true sanctuaries for terrorist organizations.

Improving United Nations political institutions and security systems constitutes the most effective method of addressing the threats facing humankind. It is therefore necessary to establish new mechanisms outside of the traditional strategic doctrines. The international legal documents created by the United Nations, and the current alliances between States, have proved insufficient to respond adequately and in a consensual manner to such threats, particularly when they are posed by entities that are not themselves States.

Because of its universal nature, the United Nations plays a central role in the management of current and future challenges. But that is not enough. It is crucial that that role be performed within a more democratic and participative framework, particularly with regard to major decisions on international peace and security.

Iraq and other parts of the Middle East are the main hotbeds of tension in the world today, and the combined efforts of the United Nations are being focused on that region. The continued loss of life in Iraq — with most of those killed being innocent civilians, including United Nations officials, among them the late Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Sergio Vieira de Mello — is a reminder of the need for increased support by the international community to ensure the security of the Iraqi people, the building of new institutions and the beginning of the reconstruction of the country.

The will of the international community, and certainly that of the Iraqi people, is for Iraq to become, as soon as possible, a viable, democratic State with institutions validated by its people, and a country living in peace with its neighbours.

The achievement of this goal implies the establishment of a political and institutional framework in which the United Nations plays an active role, specifically in the pacification and unification of the country; in the internal political dialogue; in the process of national reconciliation; and in the establishment of new democratic institutions.

Angola hopes that the present convergence of positions among the members of the Security Council on the role of the United Nations in Iraq will facilitate an understanding relative to the transitional process in general and to the transfer of sovereignty to the Iraqi people.

Angola deplores the loss of civilian life and the material damage caused by the escalation of the conflict in the Middle East. The rekindling of violence between Palestinians and Israelis represents the greatest danger to the implementation of the road map for peace, whose ultimate objective is the signing of an agreement for the creation of an independent, viable Palestinian State, living side by side and in peace with Israel and its other neighbours. In our view, that is the only solution capable of putting a definite end to the cycle of violence.

The end, last year, of the armed conflict in Angola, and the success of the peace process, are among the most extraordinary political achievements seen in sub-Saharan Africa in recent years. With the attainment of peace in Angola, the Southern African region became, for the first time in several decades, a zone free from conflict, and it can now focus its human and material resources on reconstruction and development efforts.

Angola today is a country in its post-conflict stage. It is committed to the tasks of overcoming the heavy burden of a 40-year conflict, focusing on the strengthening of its democratic process — which even during the difficult war period was never abandoned by the Government — and fully resuming its legitimate role within the regional and international context.

As a result of the impact of the conflict on the human, economic, social and financial structures of the country, and given the inequities inherited from our colonial past, the current post-conflict stage — which will lead to the building of a new society in Angola — is a difficult and painful one, and this has been an obvious impediment to an immediate response to the legitimate aspirations of Angolan citizens.

The challenges that confront Angola are enormous — perhaps immeasurable. The main challenges include the resettlement of more than 4 million displaced persons and 450,000 refugees; the social reintegration of more than 80,000 former military personnel and their respective families; the resolution of the problem of absolute poverty, which now afflicts more than half of the Angolan population; and the reconstruction of the social and economic infrastructure.

At the same time, in spite of the scarcity of available resources, we are creating the necessary conditions to hold elections in the near future. Despite our numerous problems and challenges, there is hardly any assistance from the international community for Angola, as compared with other countries in similar circumstances, some of which received an immediate response to their appeals, even though they lacked de jure institutions. We would like to believe that such treatment is not the result of any form of discrimination against our country.

There is no example in modern history of a State, rich or poor, that, in the aftermath of a devastating and destructive war such as that which afflicted Angola, has managed to overcome the burden left by such a war and rise again without outside assistance. In Angola, this reconstruction effort has, up to now, been borne solely by the Angolans themselves, in spite of the reiterated promises that the only factor that hindered the supply of aid to our reconstruction was the pacification of our country.

We hereby renew, therefore, our appeal to the international community to help Angola in its domestic reconstruction effort. To this end, my delegation will submit a draft resolution on international assistance and the reconstruction and economic development of Angola, which proposes that an international donor conference be convened. We are counting on the support of the Assembly.

Angola also welcomes the progress made in the area of peace and security in other regions of the continent, especially the Democratic Republic of Congo. The role of Angola, as well as that of its partners, was crucial in preventing a situation of chaos and disintegration in the territory of that brotherly country, with which we share a long border, and in convincing the parties to give up war and choose instead a negotiated political solution.

The Congolese patriots have shown signs of great maturity in guaranteeing the success of the peace process and the transformation of the Democratic Republic of the Congo into a viable country that does not constitute a threat to the stability of its border regions.

Angola will continue to be open to strengthening the traditional relations of friendship and cooperation it

has maintained with the authorities of the interim Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, as well as with future authorities that are legitimately elected by popular vote.

There is still a stalemate with regard to the situation in the Western Sahara. Difficulties regarding the holding of a referendum on the self-determination of the territory are a hindrance to the search for a definitive solution to this question. Angola urges the parties involved to show flexibility and seek a political solution that enables the people of that territory to decide freely about their own destiny.

Today, as one part of the world, particularly the industrialized countries, enjoys considerable wealth, 40 per cent of the 600 million Africans continue to survive on less than one dollar a day. In fact, Africa continues to show the lowest social and economic development indicators, and those levels are becoming even worse, due to the marginalization of the African countries in the progress of globalization and within the world economy, where trade and capital share are only 1 per cent.

Africa is also the continent that benefits the least in terms of foreign direct investment, receiving only 7 per cent of the investment targeted at the developing countries. External debt has been a huge obstacle to the development process because repayment of the debt service alone has depleted the already-limited national resources of the African States. Angola supports the cancellation of the external debt service of the least developed countries, particularly those in the African continent.

The macroeconomic measures imposed by the Bretton Woods institutions within the framework of the structural adjustment programme have not always been able to help the African continent overcome its international economic problems. In many cases, that has led to controversial results. Based on such results, experience has shown that, in fact, the financial institutions very often do not take into account the idiosyncrasies of each country and frequently put the Governments in the position of choosing between meeting the conditions imposed by the financial institutions or meeting the real needs of their people.

Angola hopes that, with the establishment of the African Union and the launching of the New Partnership for Africa's Development, the tragic situation in which the African continent finds itself today can be alleviated by setting priorities and giving special attention to immediate economic development issues.

The Acting President: I now call on Mr. Roy Chaderton-Matos, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Venezuela.

Mr. Chaderton-Matos (Venezuela) (*spoke in Spanish*): I begin this speech with mixed emotions — happiness over the election of our friend Julian Hunte — Minister of our sister country in the Caribbean, Saint Lucia — as President of this body; and pain, because our United Nations lost one of its best people, as did Brazil, an exemplary member of one of the world's soundest diplomatic systems. Sergio Vieira de Mello died for peace and human rights, causes that illuminated his life as a diplomat and a Brazilian.

There are other unfortunate examples from other times. We lost Anna Lindh, Swedish Minister for Foreign Affairs, and daughter of the one of the countries most closely linked to social justice, who was educated in the Nordic tradition of social advancement and commitment to peace and democracy. Years earlier, another Swede — Olaf Palme — died, a man of peace and good will, to whom the international community bade farewell with the song of Chilean Violeta Parra, *Gracias a la vida*, as a tribute to his struggles on behalf of the persecuted, the disenfranchised and the impoverished.

At the beginning of the 1960s, while on a peace mission, United Nations Secretary-General Dag Hammarskjöld, also from Sweden, died in what was apparently an accident, amid the tangled, political turbulence in a Congo assailed by its enemies at home, as well as international factors that were depriving its sovereign leadership of vital oxygen. Still earlier, Count Folke Bernadotte — also Swedish — was a victim of terrorism while on a peace mission for the United Nations in Jerusalem. Even before that, at the end of the Second World War, Swedish diplomat Raoul Wallenberg, who, from Budapest, opened the way to freedom for Jews who were being persecuted by Nazi barbarity, disappeared without a trace.

It seems that nothing has changed. Social injustice goes on forever. Conflicts repeat themselves. The protagonists of historic change are physically eliminated or morally destroyed. The advocacy of violence is dragging us towards terrorism and war.

Inspired by the values of social justice, democracy and peace, on behalf of the President of the

Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, Hugo Chávez Frías, I wish to reaffirm our support for the United Nations from a position that is critical yet unambiguous and totally consistent with its loftiest goals. These same values inspire us in Venezuela, a country that prided itself on being the richest and most democratic nation in Latin America, but that squandered its privileged historical opportunities and fell into a process of ethnical and social decay that has brought us close to the abyss. As a result, we had to assume a profound process of transformation towards peace and democracy.

The sectors affected by the democratic transformation have resorted to force to frustrate this commitment of the majority. They have resorted to military coup, oil sabotage, financial panic and media terrorism. Thank God that they failed, but they still caused much damage.

The provisions of a Constitution approved by the people in a referendum that expands the basis of democracy in a social State founded on law, and which is truly our country plan for all, have generated violent and anti-democratic opposition. Opening the way to participatory democracy and to an economy that is free, yet not anarchic, and that protects private freedoms without bowing to the almighty market, has stirred up the most egoistic and insensitive sector of our country and of the international community — the neoliberals. On this subject, His Holiness Pope Paul VI, in his encyclical *Populorum Progressio*, of March 1967, said

> "This unchecked liberalism leads to dictatorship rightly denounced by Pius XI as producing 'the international imperialism of money'. One cannot condemn such abuses too strongly by solemnly recalling once again that the economy is at the service of man."

Entrepreneurs who took no risks, protected by a colluding Government under a captive market, who did not compete and who evaded taxation promoted a conspiracy against the legitimate Government of Venezuela, allied with international sectors that had been past beneficiaries.

Now, therefore, our democracy, threatened unsuccessfully by certain Venezuelan media magnates, invites members of the international community to see for themselves in Venezuela the strength of our society and the immense civil liberties available in our country, including the broadest freedom of expression in our entire hemisphere. We will welcome witnesses to come to Venezuela and watch our television, read our newspapers, interview the owners of the private media, listen to commentators and news anchors, and draw their own conclusions. We need them to familiarize themselves with the most hidden threat against democracy: the media dictatorship, a mirror of the culture of violence and mediocrity.

Our process of social change in peace and democracy was interrupted by an assault against legality by the media and their hypnotized followers. In scarcely three days, during their ephemeral de facto Government, all democratic institutions were abolished, before people and soldiers in the streets restored normalcy. Today, we aspire to peace and reconciliation among Venezuelans. In our democracy, there is room and hope for everyone.

We want also peace for our sister Colombia and in Northern Ireland, in the Balkans, between Jews and Palestinians and throughout the world. Peace is also the aspiration of the Members of the United Nations, but there will not be lasting peace without social justice; there will not be stable democracies without social justice; and freedom will be a fraud without social justice.

We congratulate the Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan, on his balanced and firm guidance of the Organization at the very difficult time that the world is passing through and on his wise and heartfelt message to this democratic Assembly.

This year, our activities in the General Assembly are overclouded by the attack on the United Nations headquarters in Baghdad, where so many faithful servants of the Organization lost their lives, by the aftermath of the war and the tense situation existing in the Middle East and by the alarming world poverty indices, a scenario that leads us to profound reflection and demands that we strengthen the Organization's capacity to respond.

Venezuela's action has been aimed at restoring and promoting multilateralism as a means and a blueprint for the shaping of a more democratic world. Unilateralism is monochromatic, worn out, oppressive and authoritarian; multilateralism is polychromatic, animated, tolerant and democratic. In that conviction, we assumed the responsibility of chairing the Group of 77 last year and the Group of 15, whose summit meeting we will hold next year in my country. There are mechanisms through which the developing world is expressing its multilateral voice and its aspirations to the universal common good and to international social justice.

Historical developments since 1945 require that we have a more democratic and more representative Security Council. We must strengthen the General Assembly given its democratic and participatory nature. We want the Economic and Social Council to be the powerful organ that it has not been allowed to be.

The Charter of the United Nations cannot be tailored to suit unilateral conveniences. War is not a romantic adventure that brings us to a happy ending in which the superheroes defeat the villains. Sometimes, war turns into a death trap that causes harsher suffering than the suffering that, in theory, it intends to alleviate. Sometimes, it brings other wars, more violence and more terrorism.

Use of force by the State should not be undertaken at the discretion of those who happen to be interested at the time. The responsibility of the Organization's Members is collective, as the international security that we want to protect and guarantee must be. We all desire a better world for future generations, and why not for ourselves? We are all protagonists in this world drama; hegemonies appear archaic and authoritarian. Our objective is a strengthened, universal and democratic Organization.

A year ago in this Hall, we condemned the abominable terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001, in which we lost thousands of citizens of the United States and of other countries. That sudden holocaust was perhaps the product of religious fundamentalism, but it is unjust to single out the believers of one faith for acts of extremist minorities when other minorities of believers have also committed crimes against humanity in the name of the Lord. Terrorism destroys human lives, both of innocents and of combatants; it torments family members, friends and peoples. There is no good terrorism, not in the name of an ethnicity or of a nationality; not in the name of justice or of freedom; not in the name of God.

Four days ago, on behalf of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, I deposited the ratification instruments of the International Convention for the Suppression of Terrorist Bombings, the International Convention for the Suppression of the Financing of Terrorism and the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflicts. Yesterday, the Venezuelan Parliament made the Inter-American Convention against Terrorism a law of the Republic. We hope that the ratification procedure will be completed within the Organization of American States as soon as possible.

Nevertheless, we must continue the frontal assault on the most widespread and destructive forms of terrorism: poverty and social exclusion. The developing world is suffering from hunger, poverty and exclusion caused by an unjust economic system enveloped in the practices of savage neo-liberalism and in the globalized economy with an unfair scheme of commercial trade that generates unemployment, exploitation, inequality and resentment. It is a system that attacks the dignity of the human person. Its leaders are not accustomed to speaking of social justice in their statements.

One initiative that the President of Venezuela has undertaken to fight poverty is the creation of an international humanitarian fund that we proposed at the International Conference on Financing for Development, held at Monterrey; at the World Summit on Sustainable Development, held at Johannesburg; and once again in the General Assembly. The fund is designed to be a consistent and innovative source for financing non-refundable resources coming from the reduction of military expenditures and money confiscated as a result of narco-trafficking and corruption. It will be an effective formula of international assistance to generate opportunities for economic and social progress in countries excluded from traditional financing schemes. Converging proposals make us optimistic in the light of this type of initiative.

I conclude with a quotation from His Holiness John Paul II in 1994:

> "The world longs for peace and has a desperate need of peace. Yet wars, conflicts, increasing violence and situations of social unrest and endemic poverty continue to reap innocent victims and to cause divisions between individuals and peoples. At times peace appears a truly unattainable goal! In a climate made cold by indifference and occasionally poisoned by hatred, how can one hope for the dawn of an era of peace, which only feelings of solidarity and of love can usher in?"

That is how all Members of the Organization should concentrate our efforts to find the necessary means that will enable us to ensure peace and democracy at home and in the international community, availing ourselves of the best antidote to violence: social justice.

The Acting President: We have heard the last speaker in the general debate for this meeting. However, one representative has requested to exercise the right of reply. May I remind members that statements made in the exercise of the right of reply are limited to ten minutes for the first intervention and to five minutes for the second intervention, and should be made by delegations from their seats.

Mr. Najafi (Islamic Republic of Iran): This afternoon the Foreign Minister of the United Arab Emirates raised some unacceptable claims against the territorial integrity of my country. Since we have clearly and repeatedly put on record our position on this issue on previous occasions, I need not go into details.

The Islamic Republic of Iran is fully committed to its international obligations, especially those arising from the agreement of 1971. We firmly believe that misunderstandings over its interpretation or implementation, if any, should be addressed with good will through mutually agreed mechanisms in order to find an amicable solution.

Meanwhile, my Government has always welcomed the interaction and exchange of views between Iranian and United Arab Emirates officials on issues of interest and concern to both countries. In that respect, we are pleased that talks have continued, talks in which the two parties can discuss bilateral and regional issues and take a number of positive steps to address them. We believe that dialogue between our two Governments can play a determining role in removing any existing misunderstandings.

Mr. Al-Shamsi (United Arab Emirates) (*spoke in Arabic*): On behalf of my delegation, I would like to express our disappointment at the statement made by the representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran with respect to the three occupied islands, Greater and Lesser Tunbs and Abu Musa. The United Arab Emirates deeply regrets the continued false claims made by the Islamic Republic of Iran in order to change the legal, political and historical status quo of those three islands since their occupation by the Islamic Republic of Iran in 1971. We consider that unbalanced policy of the Iranian Government to be a clear violation of the principles of the United Nations Charter, provisions of international law and the bases on which good-neighbourly relations are conducted.

We ask ourselves why the Islamic Republic of Iran has refused over the past years to respond positively to the peaceful initiatives taken by my country, which has called for serious and direct bilateral negotiations to guarantee the just settlement of this issue, or to remit the case to the International Court of Justice. We have repeatedly declared that we are ready to accept any legal ruling or opinion issued by the International Court of Justice. We consider Iran's rejection of such a step to be a result of the weakness of the legal and political arguments it employs to perpetuate its continued illegal occupation of our three islands.

My country possesses legal, historic and demographic proof of our national sovereignty over these islands. Once again, we hope that the Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran will reconsider its policy and seriously take up my country's reasonable and wise proposal for a just, equitable and comprehensive settlement of this issue, restoring the three islands to the United Arab Emirates. If that were done, it would foster relations of good-neighbourliness and cooperation between our two peoples and countries and strengthen peace, security, stability and progress in the entire region.

The meeting rose at 7.30 p.m.